Pur'p'l Tur'tlz

Music and Mischief in the San Fernando Valley: The '80s & '90s

Foreword by Evan Marcus Rotman

A Memoir by

GREG BROWN

TOO HARD TO HANDLE

A Memoir of the Pur’p’l Tur’t’lz

By Greg Brown
with Steve Bryant · Kenny Bellew · Greg Herman · Chris Baustert · Todd Myers · Ron Russell
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DEDICATION

For Steve Bryant and all the Hardshells who rode with us—your spirit, your joy, and your chaos live on in every note.

For Ethel Bryant, who gave us space, grace, and more support than we could ever repay.

And for Ken Bellew, who added the spice.

Foreword

By Evan Marcus Rotman

I'm Evan Marcus Rotman. In the late '80s and early '90s, I was one of the many friends orbiting the **Pur'p'l Tur't'lz** universe—part fan, part helper, part witness. I wasn't in the band, but I was around for the shows, the house parties, the jams, the flyers, the roadie moments, the afterglow Sundays. I got to watch a local scene become a real community, and a garage band become something bigger than a band: a time and a place you could step into and feel alive.

It was the '80s. The war on (some) drugs was in full swing—but if you were a middle-class white kid, it didn't really touch you. Pot, acid, and coke were readily available to anyone who wanted them. Crack, smack, and speed lurked on the fringes…for the "really bad kids."

If you were in high school or college back then, you probably had friends who were Deadheads. The Grateful Dead's popularity surged in that era, and after years of turning a blind eye to fans taping shows, the band quietly did something that—whether they meant to or not—helped change the music world: they made space for tapers. Tapes were currency. Music wasn't available at a click. Sometimes it took weeks or months of letters and trades with a stranger to score a few highly coveted new recordings.

As those tapes circulated through the college scene and trickled down into high schools across America, the band

that everyone loved to hate finally became hip and popular. (Jerry Garcia once said something like, “We’re like bad architecture or an old whore—if you stick around long enough, it gets respectable.”)

Meanwhile, in a little town called Canoga Park, California (and the surrounding valley towns), a handful of friends started a band and called themselves **Pur’p’l Tur’t’lz**.

It began as five guys and three chords (more chords came later). There was Kenny Bellew on rhythm guitar—skinny, smiling, usually holding a beer. On lead guitar was Greg Herman, with a teddy-bear persona and an insatiable appetite for long jams. Greg Brown handled keyboards—the true music geek of the band, quick with the quip, with hair so electric it looked like it needed batteries. Chris, followed by Todd, and later Ron held down the drums. And on bass was a skinny, beautiful man named Steve Bryant.

Steve had the biggest stage presence of them all. He played an old Fender P-Bass, usually barefoot, long red locks falling past the middle of his back—locks he eventually cut and donated to a wig company for cancer patients. He bounced around like a top when he played, sweat flying from his brow. “I’M PSYCHED!!!” was his catchphrase. He meant it—and it stuck. His energy could light up whatever room (or backyard) they were in. His basslines sweetened the dance floor the way frosting sweetens a cake.

Now that they had a band, they needed a following. They played every backyard, garage, or living room that would

have them. They were the quintessential garage band—the kind Frank Zappa's *Joe's Garage* could've been written about.

Taking a page from the Dead's playbook, they rented a flatbed truck and cruised around the valley to the spots where heads were known to gather. Somehow, they pulled the hippies out of the woodwork and built a real following. It wasn't the Panhandle in San Francisco in 1967… but it was our home-spun, 1980s version of it. It brought out the freaks.

Slowly, the band morphed from a backyard-and-garage band into a club band. An enterprising hippie started a small production company and began promoting shows and weekly club nights. The thing is, the "fans" were mostly our friends—and that meant any of us who weren't in the band might become roadies for a night: schlepping gear, rolling cables, or giving Greg Herman a ride, since he notoriously didn't drive. "Guitar tech" was a loose term; if you could get Herman to the gig, you were his tech (and you got in free).

Greg Brown worked at Kinko's Copies, so there was always a steady flow of flyers, posters, and handmade tickets. A local artist—also a friend and fan—made T-shirts and designed a logo for the band.

They still played some Grateful Dead covers, but more and more originals started showing up in the set. Word on the street was they were even working on a full album of original songs.

The popularity of **Pur'p'l Tur't'lz** soared. There were plenty of Dead-sounding cover bands in the valley, but the Turt'lz reigned supreme. They wrote songs with hooks—songs like "Spice," "Peace Of Mind," and "Two Magic Hands"—keeping the beats funky and the vibe alive. They chose their covers well, too: "I'm a Man" (Spencer Davis Group), "Sympathy for the Devil" (The Rolling Stones). And Steve's rendition of "Hard to Handle" was always a crowd-pleaser.

As the crowds grew, club gigs started attracting more mainstream fans, while the house parties became hush-hush. You had to know someone to get invited, or the sheer size of the crowd would blow the whole thing up.

Sundays often landed at a house called The Farm, where we'd BBQ, jam, and relive the weekend's stories. Toward the end of the day, we'd gather for the best 90 minutes on TV: *The Simpsons*, *In Living Color*, and *Married… with Children*. Then we'd crawl home and brace for the week.

It began to feel like a big family—seeing the same faces, week after week—and it was a great vibe. As the '80s came to a close, each band member's persona got clearer, and the band just kept getting better. We followed them all over the SFV, and even as far as Santa Barbara. I seem to remember a gig or two up in Berkeley.

Kenny Bellew had a job driving a box truck delivering Pepperidge Farm cookies—so that truck became the band's gear rig, and there was never a shortage of cookies at the shows.

As their connections widened, they got asked to open for offshoot bands connected to members of the Grateful Dead and Santana—opening for Bill Kreutzmann, Brent Mydland, and even Bob Weir. It felt like the pinnacle of that era. Things were looking up…until they weren't.

When the '80s turned into the '90s, the scene began to change. Pot, beer, and acid gave way to whiskey, coke, and meth. The drugs that once brought us together started dividing us—trippers and dancers on one side, tweakers and drunks on the other. Some people handled it. Some didn't.

And as the web tightened, the parties that used to end on Sunday night by 9:30 started stretching into Monday or Tuesday. For some, they never really ended.

The band had hit a peak: the music was solid, the fan base was growing, venues mostly took kindly to the scene, and it felt like the next "big step" was right there.

After months of production, money spent, substances consumed, and the classic tale of a manager embezzling what little money there was, the album *Hatched* came out. I can't tell you how many copies sold, but I can tell you the end came not long after its release.

Spin-off bands appeared. Greg and Steve—maybe the two most serious musicians in the group—formed an acoustic duo in the Hot Tuna vein called **The Hair Pharmerz** (and between the two of them there was enough hair to wig out a cancer ward). Greg later formed a Zappa cover band called

B.A.R.F. (Bunch 'A Rude Fuckers). Steve played in a metal/funk band called **Edicus** and worked the Hollywood club scene.

Some people moved away. Some went deep into white powders. Greg Brown—the de facto leader, maybe mostly because Kinko's made him the band's publicity engine—moved to Santa Cruz to study music. And the band, and the scene, came to an abrupt end.

I ended up tangled in my own legal snares, so I missed what was later considered "the end" of it all.

But none of us who were there will ever forget the magic that was made in our little nook of the SFV in the late '80s. For a brief moment, nobody cared how you voted, what you ate, who you slept with, or what you did for work. It was a magical, innocent era—the kind of youthful exuberance that comes with the sex-drugs-rock-and-roll lifestyle that, if you're lucky, finds you in your late teens or early twenties before life gets too serious. If you're unlucky, one of the three takes over, and you either die, get locked up, or end up sleeping in a park.

I'm grateful to be one of the ones who made it to the other side. I'll hold the memories of those years dearly, all the way to the grave. They made me the man I am today.

And now Greg Brown tells the story from the inside—the music, the mayhem, the brotherhood, the rooms and backyards and parking lots where it all happened. What

follows is a time capsule, a love letter, and a reckoning. If you were there, you'll recognize your people. If you weren't, you'll understand why those of us who were will never forget it.

—EMR

AUTHOR'S NOTE

After Steve's first major hospital stay, I visited and found him clear-eyed and on a mission: get the tapes—every hissy bedroom jam, every club board, every park-generator set—digitized and out in the world. He'd always insisted we record, even when the music or the machine wasn't ready. The best shows, of course, slipped through our fingers—that's live music—but so many magical moments (and a few darker ones) survived.

We set up at his place. I showed him how to thread a cassette, snake the deck into his MacBook Pro, arm a track in GarageBand, and upload to my SoundCloud. He was tentative with the laptop at first, then relentless. He burned a CD of every transfer, photographed the old J-cards, and typed memories for each upload—funny, blunt, sometimes heartbreaking.

As he worked, he'd call me and we'd relive the nights together, arguing tempos and laughing at the parts we misremembered. It was exactly what he'd said we'd do when we were old: look back, together.

What follows are Steve's candid notes, paired with the audio—the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Archive—that underwrites our story. *To me, it's a treasure.*

I

NTRODUCTION

We weren't polished. We weren't on a label. We weren't the sure thing. In a world that prizes neatness and formula, the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz were the wild card—rough, creative, and a little unruly.

From our first messy jam sessions to late-night guerrilla gigs, we chased a dream bigger than ourselves. The music industry loves some stories and leaves others behind. Ours wasn't about contracts or hits—it was about grit, chaos, and magic. About five misfits who refused to quit.

This is our story as I remember it. I've brought in other voices where I can—fans, friends, bandmates—but memory is slippery. I have no doubt Greg Herman, Chris, or Todd would tell parts differently. Steve and Kenny aren't here to ask. What I do have are old tapes, flyers, and fragments of conversations that still carry their spirit.

So this is part memoir, part band history, part love letter to the nights that almost broke us—and the songs that still keep us alive. It's about the moments when we were too raw, too loud, too hard to handle…and maybe exactly who we were meant to be. "Where memory blurs, the tapes speak."

For Steve, for Kenny, and for all the Hardshells who believed we were worth the ride—their spirit hums on every page.

— Greg Brown
Santa Cruz, California · 2025

ONLINE SHELLS & ARCHIVE

For deeper dives, music, photos, and artifacts:

- The Pur’p’l Tur’t’lz Archive (audio) https://soundcloud.com/greg-brown-37/sets/purpl-turtlz-archive-a-k-a-the
- Pur’p’l Tur’t’lz Family on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/groups/137835045410
- Photo Archive https://www.facebook.com/groups/137835045410/media/photos
- Video Playlist https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdfla0zpEqdSHHMBT7AUvWx7QMoxAbE_K&si=IBt_c2utpwVD5og8
- Full Book & Media Bundle (Internet Archive) https://archive.org/details/too-hard-to-handle-purp-l-turt-lz-memoir-greg-brown
- Merch & Hard Goods https://direct.distrokid.com/gregbrown/

PART I — OVERTURE — PRE–PUR'P'L TUR'T'LZ

We learned to be a band in living rooms and side yards, where teenage bravado met cheap tape and somebody's older neighbor who "could play slide." The songs didn't always have names, and one of them borrowed a fistful of Dylan lines on the understanding that theft plus love equals collaboration. What we lacked in technique we made up in momentum—two chords and a dare.

"It's kind of a song about nothing," Steve wrote later, "but the Turtlz made it rock."

That's how it started: a handful of friends, a few riffs, and a belief that the room would hold.

EARLY CO-CONSPIRATORS: DAN, JIM & GARY

We had a circle just older than us who kept the doors open and the tape rolling. Dan Briggs could do everything—act, draw, grab any instrument and make it talk—keys next to Steve in the very first jams, guitar on the fly when a cable appeared. Jim Ellis showed up with what was likely a white Gibson ES-335, beautiful and a little intimidating in a living room. And across Marylee, Gary Friedman—My Marylee Street neighbor—shot the photos that prove any of this happened; if the early years have a visual memory, it's his.

From Dan, posted on Facebook:

“I was on that flatbed truck, playing someone’s guitar down Ventura Blvd—I swear there was a trip to Hollywood too, but my memory is a messy room now.

Eventually, Kenny turned off my amp (I was horrible).
Stoned and happy, we were in a dream.
I was also at your Country Club shows.”
— Daniel Briggs

They weren’t just add-ons; they were part of the weather. The flatbed down Ventura, the stake-bed in the hills, the clubs that felt bigger because familiar faces were in the dark—our band learned to breathe in rooms those friends helped make.

Chapter 1: The Valley in the ’80s

The San Fernando Valley — Summer 1982, wasn’t the pastel-polo paradise MTV sold to the world. For us, it was strip malls, cracked asphalt, and suburban garages that shook with distortion. Ventura Boulevard baked under relentless sun by day; by night, the streets pulsed with a low-grade rebellion—neon, car exhaust, cheap beer, and somebody’s older brother’s cassette deck turned up just a little too loud.

You could find the era’s soundtrack everywhere: Camaros blasting Journey, Van Halen leaking from open garages, and whatever was on the radio bouncing off 7-Eleven awnings. But our real religion lived on tape—bootlegs passed hand to hand, album covers stared at like sacred texts. We weren’t chasing Top 40. We were Deadheads first. Not just listeners or fans—we loved the whole philosophy: make it an event, bring your people, share what you’ve got, stretch the night until it feels like a small universe. We were trying to duplicate that feeling in a smaller, Valley-kid way.

Sanctuary for rejects

Steve Bryant and I didn’t become friends because we were model students. We met at summer band camp, got paired up as “catch-up partners” for marching drills, and never actually caught up. By fall, we were in Instrumental Instruction for an entire semester—Steve on trombone, me fumbling with French horn.

We did learn some things in that class… and then we learned other things when we were *supposed* to be practicing in the gym.

There was a way to climb up into the ceiling where the lights were, disappear into the shadows, and sneak off. Sometimes we just goofed off. Sometimes we smoked weed like we were auditioning for the world's least impressive crime documentary. Either way, we were already building the same skill the band would later depend on: finding the hidden door.

We wanted respect that didn't seem available at El Camino. We knew we were cool—at least in our own heads—and we weren't being treated like it. So we started making our own world: tapes, jokes, long conversations, and that growing feeling that music could be a way out.

Living-room mile zero

After graduation in 1982, the dream finally got noisy.

Steve invited me into his mom Ethel's "off-limits" formal living room—plastic-protected couches, polished tables, the whole deal. In the beginning it was *super* off limits. You didn't just wander into that room. But when Ethel was gone, the room changed citizenship. It became the jam room.

That night the constellation aligned:

- **Chris Baustert** — my neighbor, already building a Frankenstein drum setup (never paint cans—just a beautiful, stubborn experiment that kept evolving)
- **Kenny Bellew** — from my Pierce College guitar class, with riffs and charm for days
- **Greg Herman** — Kenny brought him over, and that's a big part of where it all *hatched*
- **Steve Bryant** — already the bassist in spirit, even before the role was fully official
- **Me** — trying to figure out how to make keys belong in a room full of guitars

We pushed the furniture aside and claimed the place like we'd paid rent. We weren't polished. We weren't coordinated. We barely had a shared vocabulary. It was experimental—like five people talking at the same time, but not about the same subject… until the groove occasionally forced us into agreement.

We jammed on two chords for what felt like the length of a minor religious movement—"Franklin's Tower," "I Know You Rider," "Fire on the Mountain," and whatever else the Dead had put into our bones.

When the amps finally cooled, Steve wiped sweat off his bass and grinned:

"We may suck—but I'm psyched!"

Clear ash, sacred bass

Steve's first real bass was a **clear-ash G&L**, given to him by his father. It wasn't just an instrument—it was precious, almost mythic. That bass helped define Steve's whole presence: beautiful tone, big heart, and an intensity that could make a living room feel like a stage.

Beer, weed, and the Jedi line

Let's not rewrite history: we were drinking beer, some of us underage, and we were smoking weed constantly. We also always smelled like it—like the Valley had a "band smell" and we were committed to it.

One night the police showed up around **6 in the morning**. We all hid, genuinely worried we'd be arrested. Steve looked the police in the eye and deadpanned:

"We're not doing it anymore."

And they left.

It felt like a Jedi moment. We were wired and relieved and stupidly brave, so we started playing again. Eventually the cops came back. Steve delivered the same line again—same calm, same eye contact—and somehow it worked *a second time*.

Whew. We dodged a bullet.

The band becomes a family

In the beginning, we didn't fully know what we all had in common besides wanting to play our instruments together. But we found it fast: the Grateful Dead—yes, the music, but also the culture. A gathering. A tribe. A feeling.

We started building that around ourselves. Rehearsals turned into overnight hangs. People needed showers. People needed couches. Herman and Kenny didn't always have great housing, and the band's orbit became a place to land—sometimes for sleep, sometimes just to stay awake all night and feel less alone.

And sure—girls were another goal. Kenny had a girlfriend when we met, but the rest of us were young and trying to meet beautiful people who would love us back. Sometimes we chased romance with the same strategy we used on jams: keep playing until something magical happens.

First songs, first sparks

The earliest originals didn't arrive all at once, and I want to keep the timeline straight: **my first song was "Picture Without Words."** Later came "Two Magic Hands," and Kenny's originals came later too.

But even before the "official songs," the bigger thing was already happening: we weren't just forming a band—we were forming a family. A messy one. A funny one. A too-loud one. A brotherhood that would outlast the rooms we borrowed and the rules we broke.

The Valley gave us our rough edges.

This living room gave us our starting line.

And once that line existed, we couldn't un-cross it.

"Play loud enough and the cul-de-sac becomes the cosmos."
— Steve Bryant, cassette diary, 1981

Chapter 2: Roots, Rockets & Rookie Chaos

The summer of ’82 turned the Valley into a jukebox. Camaros blasted Journey, Styx bounced off 7-Eleven awnings, and Van Halen leaked from open garages. But the real magic happened after dark in Steve Bryant’s paneled bedroom, where incense curled through a cracked window and record sleeves littered the carpet like confetti. A battered Grateful Dead bootleg spun endlessly—the same one that would later resurface as *From the Vault, Vol. 1*. Between Pink Floyd’s lunar voyages, Yes’s odd meters, and Jaco making the bass sing, we found our call.

We weren’t chasing school dances or prom gigs. We wanted something wilder.

Chris Baustert, my neighbor, locked down the kit with duct-taped snares and scavenged cymbals. Steve was always the bassist—no one else could’ve carried that role. Kenny entered from my Pierce College guitar class, slinging Telecaster fire that cut through the haze. Greg Herman brought restless energy and a guitar tone that could go from sparkle to fuzzed-out chainsaw in a bar or two. And me? I was still fumbling toward the keyboard, one stubborn left hand at a time.

At first it was beautiful chaos. Songs bled together: “I Know You Rider” into “Fire on the Mountain” into a two-chord “Franklin’s Tower” that spiraled into what we later called “Sea Dee.” Nobody drove the train, but somehow it didn’t

crash. It was a rock-and-roll version of free jazz—reckless, exploratory, always one beat away from collapse.

The Living-Room Lab

Our makeshift studio was everything: rehearsal space, sanctuary, sound lab, proving ground. Steve's bedroom doubled as headquarters, but sometimes we took over Ethel's formal living room again, or shoved amps into a backyard with extension cords and homemade lighting. The gear was hand-me-down or hacked together, but the conviction was pure.

Herman was the wild card. He played constantly—inspired, exhausting, relentless. He could stay up longer than anyone, riffing and talking until dawn… and yes, he could be genuinely furious if you woke him "too early" at 11 a.m. He cracked jokes mid-riff, turned rehearsals into comedy sessions, and somehow kept the energy alive when everyone else sagged.

Herman ran on riff-fuel and reverse sleep schedules, and the band learned to orbit him without getting swallowed.

Keys and Credit Cards

By '84, my pawn-shop guitar was gathering dust. A trip through Asia with my friend Rob Bragg yielded a Yamaha keyboard with mini-keys—half the price it would've been in the States—and I lugged it across Hong Kong and Japan until it landed in our jams.

At first I could barely manage one note at a time. My brother Steve heckled me—"Two hands, bro!"—until I finally pulled it off. Out of that stubbornness came "Night Fades Into the Day," one of my earliest originals that felt like a song instead of a sketch.

Meanwhile, Steve flashed a new credit card with a five-grand limit and returned from Guitar Center with a full PA system. Stands, cables, mics—the works. Miffed that I hadn't been included, I bought my own stand and staked a spot at center stage.

"Plug me in," I said, and from then on our vocals cut through the chaos.

The "Spice" Origin

There's a moment on a backyard tape where the jam spills out of "The Other One," and Kenny starts threading a new chord shape through the noise. No one reacts onstage—we're too busy surfing the wave—but on playback you can hear a song being born. Months later it had a title, "Add a Little Spice to Life," and a permanent slot in the set.

That was how a lot of it worked. A riff would appear in the middle of a jam, we'd ignore it in real time, then later someone would say, "Wait—go back to that part." The tapes were our sketchbook.

Rookie Chaos

Rehearsals spilled into hijinks. We bluffed our way into Hughes Junior High—long abandoned—by claiming we were filming a "video project." Power tripped mid-"Scarlet Begonias," and we finished unplugged while lockers rattled in time.

Other times, we just chased sound. Rented studios turned raw jams into slightly tighter forms. Kenny floored us with "Havin' Fun," a song that felt like an anthem for all of us. Herman's riffs spun into kaleidoscopes. My keyboard scribbles started to solidify into real parts.

We were still reckless, still improvising on fumes and stubborn energy—but the longer we played, the clearer it became: the chaos was taking shape.

"The band wasn't just noise—it was survival. Every late-night jam, every blown breaker, every borrowed living room was one step toward finding out who we really were."

CHAPTER 3: FIRST FANS, FOUND FAMILY, AND THE GRIND

By late ’83, something shifted. Our living-room jams weren’t just for friends anymore—strangers started showing up, following the trail of bootleg tapes, flyer raids, and what I can only call stoner telepathy. One kid said he’d heard about us from “a friend of a friend at a Garcia Band show,” and that was enough. Suddenly, the living room was our secret venue.

Steve had sketched a turtle in shades. I scrawled LOUD / FREE / BYOB. Together we wallpapered Reseda - Summer 1986, to Winnetka with our DIY gospel. Forty-eight hours later, six-packs in hand, people were knocking:
“Is this where the Tur’t’lz play?”

They weren’t just party crashers. They were Deadheads, vinyl junkies, storytellers. Between songs, the real noise wasn’t our amps—it was the arguments: Red Rocks ’78 vs. Nassau ’81, who had the better cassette deck for trades, whether Dylan’s gospel tour was inspired or insane. We were playing music, sure, but something else was happening: we were building a tribe.

It was messy, loud, and far from glamorous—couches disappeared under strangers, pizza vanished before it cooled—but for the first time, I felt what bands like the Dead had built on a bigger scale: a community that believed music was the excuse, not the destination.

“They weren’t shows; they were turbo-charged living-room potlucks with loud guitars.”
— Greg Herman, 2024 interview

BROWN BROTHERS PRESENTS

The crown jewel came one Saturday when my folks were in Palm Springs. Someone scored orange-sunshine blotter “for inspiration,” and by 9 p.m. the room was vibrating. Curtains sealed, lamps dimmed—we dove into “Eyes of the World,” “Fire on the Mountain,” and a 30-minute “Franklin’s Tower” that refused to land.

Kenny balanced on the coffee table, wringing whale sounds from his Tele. Chris flipped his floor tom for a tribal drone. I held a synth note so long I forgot the key. By dawn we were tangled in cables, blaming a knocked-over piano bench on “redecorating.”

THE CHARACTERS IN THE ROOM

By then, the band was starting to feel like more than just music. Each of us brought quirks that became part of the fabric.

Around the edges were friends like Rob Bragg, who once did a hundred laps around my parents’ house on acid, orbiting like a manic planet, while inside we stared at the TV

convinced the music was syncing perfectly with the images. We didn't yet know about *Dark Side of the Moon* and *The Wizard of Oz*—we just knew that on acid, everything syncs… or nothing does.

CROSSING SCENES: URBAN DREAD

Kinko's Copies wasn't just a paycheck—it was part of the Tur't'lz lifeline. Late nights at the copy machine produced half our flyers, and it's also where I met Calvin Black from Urban Dread, a reggae band that was everything we weren't: tight, professional, and constantly gigging. We loved them, and one night decided to throw a shared party at their place.

That house was like stepping into another world. On the outside, just a Valley four-bedroom. On the inside: the whole band lived there, a sunken living room with a tiki bar, colored lights, and a glowing saltwater fish tank. It had a vibe —tropical, funky, electric.

We opened, they played, then we swapped back and forth: rock into reggae, reggae back into rock. The crowd was swaying, the energy high, when it suddenly crashed. A gang of punks—or maybe supremacists—barged in, breaking windows, smashing furniture, turning the night into a brawl. We defended our gear with whatever we had—Herman raised his guitar like a bat, ready to swing. By the time the cops arrived, the fish tank was shattered, saltwater soaking the carpet, fish flopping helplessly on the floor. Urban Dread had to move out not long after.

A night that started as one of the coolest cross-scene hangouts of our early years ended in silence and broken glass. It was a reminder: music could build community, but it couldn't always shield us from the chaos of the world outside.

Beach Babe (the almost-movie song)

Another little side-quest from that era: *Beach Babe*. Somehow we got connected to a couple "filmmakers"—I'm still not sure how legit it all was—but we were intrigued and honestly kind of honored that anyone outside our cul-de-sac orbit wanted *us* for anything. We drove to a part of town that didn't feel like our side of the map, and everyone was friendly: people who seemed like cast, people who seemed like crew, lots of talking about what this "beach movie" needed.

So we did the most Pur'p'l Tur't'lz thing possible: we tried to write a song to order.

They told us it was a beach movie, and we put together a tune called **"Beach Babe."** It wasn't really our style. It never fully clicked. We went a few times, we tried to make it work, and the whole thing had that faint feeling of a hallway that doesn't lead anywhere.

But here's the part I don't want to lose: **Chris Baustert was key in writing that song.** He helped shape it, and it *does* exist—somewhere in our recordings—like a little fossil from the era when we were willing to say yes to anything just to see what would happen.

THE HARDSHELLS ARE BORN

Out of all this madness, our first real fan tribe took shape: the Hardshells. They printed turtle tees, ran flyer missions, even set up a bootleg-tape booth that kept our gas tanks full. Couch-surfers, cable-haulers, snack-runners—if you needed it, a Hardshell delivered.

"Tur't'lz shows were like mini-Dead lots—veggie burritos, someone spinning poi, and that one guy selling hacky sacks out of his trunk."

— Jerry "Gongles" Gonzales, first-gen Hardshell
They weren't spectators. They were co-conspirators.

GRINDING FORWARD

Behind the laughter and the chaos, real life pressed in. Steve cared for his grandmother while juggling the band. Chris and Steve skipped school. I went to Pierce College because my parents required it if I wanted to stay at home. It was a sweet deal compared to some of my friends, but it also meant I

carried a weight: *if I was going to take music seriously, it had to be worth their support*.

Promotion became an obsession. We printed flyers, licked stamps, stuffed envelopes, and even set up a hotline with Steve's answering machine.

"You've reached the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz..."
...became part of our lore.

Artists like Racer, Saffron, Achim and Vegetable made our flyers look legit—half '60s psych, half modern collage. The grind wasn't easy, but it was ours. Each late-night flyer run, each house party—or house riot—was another brick in the shell we were building.

One of our main artists was Racer—Tracy. Five feet tall, almost nothing, with long straight hair so dark it reads black in most light. Her hugs were famous: you could wrap your arms around her and, somehow, still have room left over. But don't let the size fool you. Tracy was stronger than you can imagine—steady, stubborn, determined—and she could outwork a room full of dudes who thought they were "the real deal."

She wasn't just an artist for us. She was part of our infrastructure. She could draw a logo, paint a cover, design a flyer that looked like it came from another planet... and then go out to her garage and *print the merch herself*. Tracy had a

four-color screen-printing press set up at home and could pump out shirts with her own beautiful designs like it was nothing.

I've seen her print a hundred Pur'p'l Tur't'lz shirts—front *and* back—in a day. That wasn't "support." That was muscle.

The music was the heartbeat, but the family we stumbled into—wild, messy, fragile, unforgettable—was the real story.

Chapter 4: Girls, Couches & 4 A.M. Conversations

The motivation behind the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz wasn't just riffs—it was the chase. Kenny was the only one with a steady girlfriend. The rest of us figured the right chord change might conjure romance…or at least someone to split a Mission burrito with.

Between gigs, we lived like migrating turtles: Herman and Kenny crashed wherever the amps landed—sofas, throw rugs, even the foot of Chris's bed when the living room overflowed. Sleep was optional; togetherness was mandatory. And if you stayed tangled in the same extension cords long enough, something magical always seemed to happen.

From Rehearsal to Ritual

Rehearsals morphed into parties without warning. Laughter bounced off stucco walls, barbecue smoke tangled with guitar feedback, and somebody's cousin always wheeled in a hibachi just as Herman launched into another fuzz-drenched solo. Kenny's deadpan shout—"Soft dynamics!"—usually provoked the opposite: Herman's windmill chords rattling patio lights until neighbors leaned out their windows.

Drop-ins kept things unpredictable. Dan Briggs wove guitar lines between my synth patches. Jim Ellis elbowed his Strat into the mix. Doug Monteith's road-worn tone cut through the haze like a lighthouse beam. Each new arrival shifted the chemistry.

Sundays often started as casual tune-ups and ended as ritual: tighten the set until sunset, barbecue chicken, then collapse on every couch by 8 p.m. to watch *The Simpsons*. Miss one of those evenings and you'd spend the week hearing rerun punchlines—dropped drumsticks, scorched burgers, the moment everyone swore you "had to be there" for.

It wasn't rehearsal. It was therapy disguised as noise.

The Blue-Light Encore

The police became our reluctant audience. Like clockwork, blue lights hit around 11:30 p.m. Steve had a gift for Jedi-style persuasion.

"We're not doing it anymore,"
…he'd deadpan, then flip the breaker himself—only to have us playing again five minutes later.

On rougher nights, the police killed the power for us. But no show ended until the amps were packed and someone launched a tailgate post-mortem over lukewarm pizza and flat MGD.

Sometimes we went acoustic after shutdown: Chris slapping a cardboard box, Herman muting strings, and fifty voices belting "I Know You Rider" into the midnight air. Those unplugged encores mattered as much as the loudest jams.

The 4 A.M. Symposium

When the gear was finally stowed, couches turned into symposium seats. We debated why Jaco's "Continuum" could make grown men cry, whether *Animals* or *The Wall* was Floyd's crowning achievement, and whether love was possible on the road—or heartbreak was the only guarantee.

Somebody would notice the first streaks of sunrise and mumble, "One more tune?" Before anyone could argue, the alarm clock was already unplugged.

Those rent-free arenas—garages, living rooms, carports—were where music and friendship fused. Steve documented everything on Scotch cassettes and a beat-up VHS camcorder. Sometimes he left the camera running long enough that we forgot it was there, catching every misstep, roar of laughter, and fire-lit jam in shaky, grainy glory.

By early '84, our ragtag noise was sharpening into a band. Handwritten set lists replaced scribbled scraps. Broken strings got swapped mid-week instead of ignored. The misspelled banner—Pur'p'l Tur't'lz—wasn't just a sound anymore. It was a flag.

And once a flag exists, the world starts testing whether you can carry it.

CHAPTER 5: BACKYARDS, BEGINNINGS & BREAKTHROUGHS

By mid-'84, owning a lawn mower meant owning a venue. Every evening we hauled amps into somebody's backyard—driveways, patios, even empty lots—looking for one working outlet and hoping the neighbors were out of town. Cinder blocks became speaker stands. Extension cords ran through sprinklers. Charcoal smoke tangled with cheap weed as dusk surrendered to curfew.

Chris's kit rattled fences. Steve's bass thumped into our sneakers. Kenny's guitar cut clean through the haze. I wedged my keys wherever they fit—often balanced on patio furniture like a bad dare. We'd stumble through "Scarlet Begonias" or "Sympathy for the Devil," then test-drive originals: "Mystical Moon," "Nowhere to Turn," Herman's dreamy "Trippin' Through the Lily Fields." Mistakes weren't accidents; they were part of the show. By the third song, the lawn had turned into a slow-dance floor and a meditation circle at the same time.

Backyards weren't glamorous, but they were ours. Every fence line felt like a stage. Every porch light was an accidental spotlight.

The Van & the Burden

My Toyota Celica could barely carry my own gear, let alone the band's. So I made the "practical" move: I bought a

decked-out Ford Econoline van, a camper on wheels—perfect in theory.

In practice, it meant one thing: I was the driver.

I picked everyone up, dropped everyone off, loaded the amps, and ran the circuit night after night. Herman rode shotgun, talking endlessly—Dead lore, oddball prog obsessions, whatever fuel kept him going—while I white-knuckled through Valley traffic. In my private fantasy of stardom, a tour bus came with a driver. Instead, I was chauffeuring the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz in circles around Reseda.

The van smelled like sweat, beer, and blown speakers. It was also where half our bad ideas turned into actual plans.

Holiday Fireworks

Our backyard circuit had landmarks.

On the Fourth of July in Granada Hills, we turned a pool party into patriotic pandemonium. "Fire on the Mountain" thundered under bottle rockets and Roman candles until a cop's megaphone cut through the groove:

"Pack up in fifteen, or we impound everything!"

Cymbals under one arm, amps balanced on skateboards, we moved faster than I've ever seen us move. Not because we were afraid of getting in trouble—because we were afraid of losing the gear. You can survive a busted party. You can't survive a missing PA.

Some nights were at Ethel's. Some nights were at my parents' place when they bailed to Palm Springs. Dennis Adkins's shoebox rental became party HQ—sessions that ran long enough to blur into the next day. People showed up with tape recorders and cameras, and sometimes it felt like the whole Valley had decided to stand close to the noise just to see what would happen.

Halloween Under Lights

Halloween '84 pulled us indoors when The Wildest invited us to open at a tiny comedy club, the L.A. Cabaret. Our flyers had done their job: the room filled with tie-dye, skeleton masks, pirate hats—our people, somehow, in a real club.

The stage was barely big enough for Chris's kit and our amps, but it didn't matter. We opened with "Scarlet Begonias" and dropped "Nowhere to Turn" to a roar that told us something important: we weren't just a backyard phenomenon.

At some point I spotted my brother Mark and his wife Susie dancing—actually there, in person—and it hit me hard. Of course it was his birthday. Oct. 31. But still. There's a special shock in seeing "your real life" and "your band life" collide under club lights.

Not long after, we played behind It's Only Rock & Roll Records on Ventura Boulevard. Milk crates became a stage. Tie-dye sheets became a backdrop. Record bins inside, our turtle logo outside. We were opening for The Wildest again,

and the line between “party band” and “real band” blurred a little more.

Clubs didn’t have sprinklers shorting out the power or landlords leaning over the fence. They had something else: expectation. Start on time. Finish on time. Prove you belong on the bill.

Breakthroughs

Backyards were wild and free, but rooms full of strangers offered a different kind of validation. When people stayed for the second set—or shouted for an encore—it landed harder than applause from a party that had nowhere else to go.

Still, I don’t want to romanticize one “big moment.” The breakthroughs came from repetition: night after night, lawn after lawn, learning how to keep the band moving even when the night didn’t cooperate. We were becoming reliable—without losing the danger.

We weren’t just learning how to be a band.

We were learning how to last.

HANSEN DAM — OUR OWN LITTLE DEAD SHOW

Hansen Dam Recreation Area, band shell

Steve Bryant (intro to the tape):
"This is part of the second set at Hansen Dam, one of the many free shows we did to try to say thank you — we love you. Lots of Dead songs, and lots of improvisation… so check it out and tell your friends, and tell us what you think, ok? Right on — thanks."

Some gigs you get invited to. Others you hustle your way onto. And then there are the ones you **create**, because you want them to exist and nobody's going to hand you permission.

Hansen Dam was that.

It wasn't a club. It wasn't a backyard. It was a band shell in a public park, and the idea was simple: **play free, play long, and make it sound huge.** These were shows we put on ourselves—our way of saying thank you to the people who kept showing up.

And we didn't treat it like a casual park jam. We hired a sound company.

That choice says a lot about who we were becoming. We wanted it to feel real—big, professional, undeniable. Stacks, wedges, a proper PA throwing sound into the open air. The concrete shell turned into our little amphitheater, and for a few hours the park became our room.

Our fans were great at hanging in parks, and they came out like a moving color field: tie-dye, bare feet, familiar faces, the same tribe that followed us from driveways and backyards and odd little pockets of the Valley where music could still turn into a gathering. People danced right up front. Others laid back on the grass and soaked it in.

There was plenty of Dead in the DNA of those afternoons—Dead songs, long improvisation, the freedom to stretch out and see where the music wanted to go. And yeah, people were partying hard. But what I remember most is the *tone* of it: positive, friendly, self-contained. Our scene knew how to be weird without being mean. It felt like a mini Grateful Dead concert, except it was ours—no clock, no ceiling, and no one telling us to wrap it up.

That freedom changed the band. When you aren't watching the time, the music stops being nervous. Songs can breathe. Jams can open up. We could follow a groove way out and bring it back when we felt it—not when someone signaled last call.

And Hansen Dam is also where we got captured the way it actually felt.

A friend of mine, Sarge—I met him at Kinko's—took the only photos we have from one of those events, and they're some of the best images of the group. You can see it all: the banner, the gear sprawled out like we'd moved in, the band mid-flight, the crowd turning pavement into a dancefloor in full

daylight. Looking at those pictures now, you can almost hear the air moving.

If the early years were about learning to play together, and the club years were about learning to survive inside the machine, then Hansen Dam was something else:

It was us, for us, with our people—our own little Dead show under the sun.

CHAPTER 6: THE NAME GAME EVOLVES

Our name wasn't a typo. It was a declaration.

One day at Shoup Park, Herman tossed out the obvious name—"Purple Turtles?"—and Steve lit up like we'd just found the secret door. I did what I always do when something feels too normal: I broke it. Dropped the vowels. Bent it toward phonetics. Pur'p'l Tur't'lz looked wrong, sounded stranger, and stuck like glue.

From that moment on, we weren't trying to blend in.

The name did exactly what a good band name should do: it made people ask questions. Sometimes they asked how to pronounce it. Sometimes they just laughed. Either way, they remembered it.

Guerrilla Branding

Marketing wasn't budgets or strategy. It was toner, tape, and streetlights.

We plastered telephone poles and pizza-parlor cork boards with turtles in shades and ransom-note lettering. Our Valley art-scene allies—Racer, Vegetable, Achim, Saffron—turned the flyers into psychedelic artifacts: collage, hand lettering, impossible color, little visual jokes that made you stare long enough to absorb the date and time.

"TODAY 4 p.m.—secret spot. Bring ears, bring beer."

Neighbors groaned. Kids poured in.

Kinko's was the nerve center—where the flyers got born and where the name started leaking into other scenes. The misspelled turtle began showing up where it didn't "belong": on binders, jackets, backstage doors, bathroom walls. Sometimes the apostrophes wandered. Sometimes people dropped half the letters. It didn't matter. The point was the flag.

The Name Becomes a Password

Once it spread, the name turned into a kind of shorthand. Bookers squinted at it on flyers, tried to say it out loud, shrugged, and put us on the bill anyway. Kids in line outside venues compared origin stories: a flyer, a cassette, a friend's older brother, a backyard you had to find by rumor.

You didn't have to spell it right to belong.

You just had to show up.

CHAPTER 7: THE BAND STOPS BEING A THEORY

By the time we hit ’84, the revolving door of jam sessions finally steadied into something more permanent. Five of us—Kenny, Herman, Steve, Chris, and me—started showing up like we meant it. Same place. Same faces. Plug in and go.

And one night it stopped feeling like “a great hang” and started feeling like a band.

We launched into “Scarlet Begonias,” and for once there were no awkward resets, no half-arguments mid-verse, no drifting into the weeds before the chorus even arrived. Steve hit his bass so hard it felt like the room moved, then turned and shouted his trademark:

“I’M PSYCHED!”

It was goofy, sure. But it was also true. That shout became a kind of ignition switch—our reminder that the point wasn’t perfection. The point was commitment.

Rehearsal Kingdoms

Our rehearsal spots were borrowed spaces, and that gave every jam a charge of urgency.

Ethel’s formal living room was our first true headquarters—loud, off-limits, temporary. My parents’ place became a stage whenever they escaped town, with the unspoken rule that we’d vanish before they returned and the neighbors could build a case against us.

Knowing we could lose the room at any time made us play harder. We didn't waste the night.

Chris's drums boomed off stucco walls, patched together from scavenged shells and duct tape. Kenny's guitar was already a laser beam—cool stance, sharp attack, perfectly timed grins. Herman's guitar ran on adrenaline and instinct, like he was narrating the night in fuzz. My keys were still cheap and stubborn, but they started finding their place under the guitars instead of fighting them. And Steve—equal parts thunder and charm—held the whole thing together.

The First Originals That Stuck

Covers were our common language. Originals were the claim we were trying to stake.

The early songs didn't arrive like lightning bolts; they arrived like discoveries. A riff with a title. A chorus that survived three rehearsals. A line that made us laugh and then refuse to delete it. "Nowhere to Turn" started feeling less like an experiment and more like a statement. "Get Up (And Do It)" gave us swagger. "Skipping Through the Lily Fields" carried Herman's strange, dreamy stamp.

We were still figuring out structures, bridges, endings. Sometimes a "new song" was just a shape we kept returning to. But the intent had changed. We weren't only stretching jams anymore.

We were trying to write.

The Manager and the Push

Enter Steve Miller—no, not that Steve Miller, though we didn't mind the confusion.

He was a few years older, scarred by Valley punk nights, and carried a spiral notebook stuffed with contacts and schemes. He didn't talk about tone or groove. He talked about guarantees, drink tickets, load-in times, and what it meant to be professional enough to get asked back.

He also talked about the Grateful Dead… constantly.

But the important part was this: he turned our beer-soaked promises into actual dates. Suddenly there were gigs on the calendar that weren't just house parties—opening slots, club nights, real rooms with start times and sound techs who did not care about our mythology.

It was the first time someone treated us like a band instead of a hangout.

And once that starts, the world tests you.
Not with romance—
with logistics.

That's when you find out if you're real.

Part II — The Music

Chapter 8: Opening for Go Ahead

We didn't get a soundcheck. That should've been my first clue the night was going to get weird.

Wolf & Rissmiller's Country Club in Reseda wasn't a backyard and it wasn't a practice space — it was a real room with a real bill, and we were the opener. Go Ahead was the main act, and we were about to find out what that meant the hard way.

My amp started acting fussy right as we were being waved on. I plugged in, touched metal, and felt that little zap that makes your brain do math in a split second: *Is this dangerous, or just annoying?* Either way, the count-in was coming, and we didn't have the luxury of slowing the train down.

That chance showed up in two words: **Go Ahead**.
Go Ahead was the real deal: Brent Mydland from the Dead, Bill Kreutzmann on drums, plus players out of the Santana/ Bay Area orbit. For a pack of Dead-soaked Valley kids, opening for them felt like getting invited into a side room of the cathedral.

The show was at **Wolf & Rissmiller's Country Club** in Reseda. For us, that might as well have been Madison Square Garden.

Country Club Reality

The Country Club was one of those rooms you hear about before you ever walk in: a big PA, real lights, touring bands on the calendar. Rolling our beat-up gear across that stage felt like sneaking into the majors with a Little League duffel.

Go Ahead's group got dialed in first, as it should: Brent's keys and vocals, Kreutzmann's kit, the whole mix tuned to them. There was an issue though. Harry Popick was the Grateful Dead's monitor engineer and he was on tour with Go Ahead. As they were setting up, he had a fit about the shape of the Country Club's monitor mix board. He said it was broken and they would need to get a suitable board or they would not perform. This show was sold out and we were counting on opening this show.

A replacement monitor board arrived from SIR a few hours later. Repaching the stage took so long we nearly got bumped. Kenny Kulber was the promoter and he insisted we get our chance to perform, thank goodness.

By the time they were happy, our "soundcheck" was pretty much:
"Hit the snare. Okay. Strum a chord. Great. You're good."

No time to find our monitors, no chance to tweak anything. Whatever mix we were getting, we were going to discover it in real time with the first song.

To make things spicier, my Roland Jazz Chorus chose that moment to get temperamental—it would not turn on. I was toggling the on/off switch and I got shocked with electricity. "Please don't die now," I thought, patting it like a nervous horse. We adjusted the power plug somehow and it began to work.

Zap, Then Fire

House lights dropped. The room settled into that low roar of people who were mostly there for the headliner but curious enough to watch the opener.

We'd decided on our opener very deliberately: "Fire on the Mountain." If we were going to prove we belonged in the same universe as Brent and Bill, starting with a Dead tune that lived in our bones felt right.

The band had begun to play and my amp had not yet turned on. After being shocked, I backed off, shook it off and was nervous because the band was already playing. Todd cracked the snare, Steve dropped the first bass note, Kenny and Herman lit up the riff, and suddenly the shock was just part of the adrenaline. The JC-120 finally settled into a proper hum—as if it had just needed to scare me first.

We were off.

Holding the Room

Playing “Fire on the Mountain” in that room felt completely different than playing it in a backyard. The Country Club PA didn’t blur anything; it magnified it. If somebody rushed a fill or sang a flat note, the whole place heard it. But when the groove locked, you could feel it slam into the back wall and bounce back.

There were Deadheads up front who obviously knew exactly who they were there to see, but they gave us room. By the second verse, some of them were actually dancing. By the time we slid from “Fire” into our own material—“Add a Little Spice,” “Nowhere to Turn,” the originals we’d hammered into shape in garages and rehearsal rooms—they weren’t just being polite. They were with us.

We didn’t have the luxury of easing in. No real soundcheck, one good zap, a temperamental amp, and a headliner’s crew waiting to reset the stage the second we were done. That pressure forced us to tighten in ways no rehearsal ever could.

What the Night Gave Us

We didn’t walk out of Wolf & Rissmiller’s with a record deal. No one swept us into a limo. Monday still came with day jobs and Valley traffic.

But that night changed how we saw ourselves.

We'd taken songs born in living rooms and driveways, walked them onto a big stage in Reseda, opened with "Fire on the Mountain" for a crowd there to see members of the Grateful Dead, survived a bad-ground zap and a sketchy "soundcheck," and still held the room.
For one set, under those Country Club lights, we weren't just the weirdly spelled band from the flyers. We belonged there.

The jolt up my arm, the first chord of "Fire," the way the room leaned in—that's why that gig still glows for me. It didn't make us famous, but it hardened the shell.

We weren't just a local party band anymore. We'd been tested on a real stage, with real stakes, and walked off knowing we could stand in that kind of light.

House Gigs in Topanga

We had a kind of success that doesn't show up on a chart.

Not "made it big" success—nothing like the Grateful Dead. But we made it small. And I'm proud of that.

Because in that era, the wins weren't stadiums. They were living rooms, backyards, canyon decks, and the feeling that somebody wanted *this band* in *this place* on *this night*—no matter how odd the invitation sounded at first.

One of our good friends was Forrest George—Lowell George's son. Lowell was already gone by then, but Forrest knew how to move through the world with that name. He could make a call, drop a connection, and doors would open that didn't usually open for bands like ours.

One time he invited us to play at his house, and it turned out to be Lowell's old place—Topanga Canyon, the real deal. There are houses that feel like a house, and there are houses that feel like a landmark. That one felt like sacred property. Not because anything miraculous happened that night. Nothing *happened* in the big, cinematic sense.

It was just good vibes. The kind you don't know you're storing until decades later when you realize it's still in you: the canyon air, the way sound travels when there isn't a "stage," the small moment of thinking, *We're really here. We're playing songs in this room. This is part of the same musical map.*

Another Topanga night was a whole different kind of memory.

We got invited to play at Mike Dwyer's house. The Dwyers—Mike, Susie, and Scotty—were friends and fans, and in my head they were the coolest family in the canyon. Their place had that "Topanga cool" you can't buy: part hangout, part art project, part sanctuary. The kind of house where you can picture a band setting up in a corner and it feels like it belongs there.

And then—because Topanga—some guy arrived with a **leopard on a leash** like it was the most normal thing in the world.

At first it played like a story you'd tell later with a laugh. People crowding in, doing that half-joke, half-nervous thing: *Is that… really a leopard?* The animal had that quiet confidence predators have. Not aggressive. Just present. Like it knew the rules didn't apply to it.

Then it went after the house dog.

The shift was instant. Not "party chaos," but that sharp, sickening kind of commotion where you can hear fear in everyone's voice at once. The leopard bit the dog and it was horrifying—too fast, too strong, too much.

Robert Flores ran in and grabbed at the animal's jaws to make it let go. Later he said he didn't even realize it was a big cat in the moment—his brain filed it under "another dog" because that's the only category that made sense. He just acted. He said the strength in the jaws was unreal.

But the dog got released. It survived, though it had deep bite wounds.

And that was the end of the novelty. The guy with the leopard was told to leave.

That's the thing about these little gigs: sometimes the memory isn't the song list. Sometimes it's the place, the people, the weirdness, the sudden danger, the way a night

can flip from magic to trauma in a second—and the way a community closes ranks to protect its own.

We didn't make it big.

But we made it small.

And small was real.

Field Note — Larry Saltman
Notes from the journals of Larry Saltman — "Purple Tur't'lz Open for Go Ahead in 1986"

Larry Saltman was one of those early Hardshells who didn't just show up — he worked. When the Turtl'z opened for Go Ahead at Chuck Landis' Country Club in Reseda (1986), Larry was pulled into stage-managing the night. What follows is Larry's memory from his journals, in his own words.

We were all raving deadheads having a good time with the music – the scene – and, most of all; with each other. In 1986 I had become an avid fan of the Grateful Dead and a working fan of the Turtl'z. Shortly after getting into the Dead, I met a couple guys that would become lifelong friends; DA and Bubba. I'll share more about these truly great friends another time. DA was hosting the Purple Turtl'z, giving them a place to play in the living room of his house in the early 80's. It was a great scene.

We were all on the same page and enjoyed delving into all that the 'turned on' GD crowd had to offer. I found in the guys in the Purple Turtl'z (PT) a special kinship. Right around 1984, I was hollering for more at PT concerts and found myself helping them pack up, set up and whatever they needed. Their personal crowd was fun and I swiftly gravitated to them.

Right before the summer of 1986, Jerry Garcia had lapsed into a diabetic coma after some drug abuse and the band started doing 'side shows' as Go Ahead and Kingfish; with Kingfish being a passion project for Bob Weir. Of course, we ate it up – wanting anything we could get to stoke the fires of our passion for the vibe that allowed us to be ourselves and the music to bound us. Things in our lives became less important than being a part of what was going on. PT were heavily influenced by the Dead and local folks (like me) dove head first into any event that smacked of that vibe.

A guy named Kenny started a promotional effort he named "Why Knot Productions" and promoted many PT performances. Kenny worked with Steve Miller (another true friend and a Manager of PT) to pull together a number of events for the PT. I acted as a grip for many of them. The best of those gigs was the time the PT opened for Go Ahead, which served as a prequel act to the Kingfish performance.

This happened at 'Chuck Landis' Country Club' in Reseda, Ca; my stomping grounds. I grew up a mile or so from the venue. As a teenager, my crowd partied on the streets of Reseda, Van Nuys, and – in general – the San Fernando Valley - Late 1983, which I will refer to as "The Valley".

You'll find my various adventures as a teenager in the valley in other notes of mine, but let me assure you: we had lots of fun on the streets. Drinking, fighting, loving, drug abuse and lots of 'hero worship' music.

Music was just starting to change, where old school rockers like Rick Derringer, Edgar Winter, George Thorogood were singing about getting laid and drinking was shifting to more of a hippy vibe (although with the same theme). When the Dead came into my life, everything changed.

Flash forward to 1986 and Jerry is in the hospital in a diabetic coma and Why Knot productions and the PT got a gig with side projects of the healthy (?) members of the GD. I was supporting them both. Kenny asked me to stage manage the event.

I'm going to refrain from going into the absolutely over the top drug/alcohol use by everybody back stage, other than to say it happened and I was a part of it. As part of my 'job' (I was paid $0 for the gig), I herded acts on stage, helped with moving equipment and kept an eye on the behavior back stage. I may not have been the best person for the job, but I took my basic responsibilities seriously. The way I saw it, it was my job to hustle the bands on and off stage and make sure our guests – namely Bobby Weir, Brent Mydland and Bill Kreutzmann – were comfortable.

Brent and Bill were having a great time backstage; slugging beers and partying it up with the locals. Bobby, however was much more private; staying alone in the 'grand' suite of the back stage area. The area Bobby was in hanging in was a back stage room that looked like a cheap motel with a wet bar.

I checked on him a couple times and he was fine until – one time - he gave me a weird look. After asking him if he was OK again, he said nothing, but looked past me. A local Deadhead was squatting in the corner, behind the door – staring at Bobby. I told the dude, whom I recognized from PT concerts, to get the fuck out – and he did.

The PTs were finishing their set and Go Ahead was getting ready to play. Go Ahead was made up of Billy, Brent and a couple session musicians. Bobby stayed up stairs until he was called for his performance in his own 'sideband', Kingfish. Kingfish used all the same musicians with Bobby joining them to take the lead.

Everything went great. The vibes – and our intoxication level - was through the roof. Go Ahead finished their set and Bobby came down stairs from his room to join the band for a rendition of Kingfish. Immediately, everyone back stage – and I mean everyone, including my 'employer', Kenny – was all over Bobby.

I shouted the crowd down and demanded that they all get behind the red line that was painted on the floor about six feet away from the stage - for just this reason. As I expected, they all fell in line and backed off of Bobby. Bobby, who was visibly relieved, turned to me and thanked me for my actions. I mentioned to him that they really didn't mean harm, they

just loved him and were usually separated by thousands of people. He thanked me again and hit the stage.
The set was great, everyone danced their asses off and worked up a sweat, throwing it around as the music took all of us away.

After Kingfish finished, their roadies were breaking down the equipment. I saw that Billy was yelling at their crew and spun a drum skin at one of his guys. Jumping in, I asked Billy what his problem was and he yells at me that, “these fuckers didn’t buy beer and now the club won’t sell it to us!” The show ended well after 2:00 AM, the cut off for sale of alcohol.

Dropping all of my responsibilities to Kenny and Why Knot Productions, I told Billy, who was now joined by a pissed off Brent, that I had a cooler full of beer in my truck that I couldn’t touch all night, as I was so busy.

Billy and Brent perked right up. Asking where this beer might be. I showed them to my truck, immediately out the back door of the Country Club.

We sat on my tailgate drinking beer and sharing a couple doobies and my (always handy) flask of bourbon until the sun started showing. I still have the drum skin Billy spun at his grip.

By any measure in my life, this was a memorable event for me. Apparently, I was not alone in this memory. The following summer, Jerry had bounced back from his diabetic coma, learned to play the guitar again and made it to the following summer tour.

My buddy, Happy Dave (the happiest Dave I have ever known), had just bought an old Blue Bird school bus and was shy to drive it. I drove the beast to the Ventura show that summer and we managed to secure a great parking place directly in back of the backstage area of the concert.

Again, I will defer further story telling of the tremendous events of the weekend for another time - with exception of this wee tidbit. A stretch limo pulled into the small camping area we had parked the bus and, as the back door opens to let out the occupants; a huge German Shepherd comes out of no where and, snarling, jumps into the limo, attacking the passengers. Without a thought, I jumped into the limo and grabbed the shepherd by his collar and threw him over my shoulder, where he welped away. Brent Mydland looks up at me from the back of the limo and asks, “Larry?”.

Larry’s “red line” detail says a lot about that era: the love was real, the boundaries weren’t, and sometimes the difference between chaos and magic was one person paying attention.

Chapter 9: Camp Templin — Where the Shell Got Hard

After our breakthrough opening for Go Ahead, we were hungry for something bigger—not in ticket sales, but in spirit. The Valley felt small, the clubs full of rules. We wanted to stretch out in a place where no one could tell us to stop.

That place became **Camp Templin**, tucked west of Castaic Lake, where scrub pines replaced streetlights and generators were our only lifeline.

We caravanned up the Grapevine with amps, kegs, and extension cords. By the time we rolled in, the clearing was alive: VW buses in circles, campfires blazing, tapestries glowing. It felt less like a gig and more like a tribal gathering. We played deep into the night, and for a while it was pure magic—music echoing through the pines, strangers becoming friends, the Valley's cul-de-sac kids turned cosmic voyagers.

But then came the moment that changed the tone forever—a story best told not by me, but by one of the first true Hardshells who was there that night: our friend Phil Ide.

Phil Ide's Memory of Templin Station

By Phil Ide (used with permission)

It was the mid 1980's, we were seniors in high school, Reagan was president and we had just been turned onto LSD and Grateful Dead. Talk about the weird turning pro! We lived on the western edge of the San Fernando Valley. Middle class misfits, trying to resurrect some type of hippie dream, escaping the MTV reality of synth pop to something that seemed a bit meatier and "real".

There began to emerge, or at least we began to recognize a tribe that had been on the road since the mid 60's. Our faces had been stolen and minds were split open and melting. We were ready to hop on the bus and go furthur.

Between pilgrimages to the traveling carnival that were Grateful Dead shows, we were eager to connect with our compatriot community of Deadheads. Many of us were like minded folks who were chasing that magical, mystical sunshine daydream one could only find at a Dead show.

There seemed to be a whole menagerie of heads who sought out this experience. College kids, old school hippies, bikers, undercover conservatives, intellectuals, chemists, tweakers, freaks, geeks, pirates and adventurers of all sorts. It was incredibly exciting to our young and mostly innocent souls.

We consumed the history of the scene. There were the acid tests, Haight-Ashbury, Monterey Pop, Woodstock and of course Altamont. So much joy, exuberance, creativity and transcendence. Yet, also chaos, malevolence and darkness.

There seemed to be much more light than dark. Needless to say, it was a lot of fun!

Many local bands would make the scene. Shows at small clubs, backyard parties, gigs in the park, playing on flatbed trucks driving around town! It was a mix of old timers and curious outsiders, but it was mostly young, idealistic kids out for a good time. One band in particular had cultivated a vibrant community of heads. They were a group of talented and intrepid musicians called Pur'p'l Tur't'lz.

In the pre-internet/cell phone days, we had to connect through "the grapevine". It was mostly word of mouth, bulletin boards at colleges or in record stores, flyers picked up at a show or if you were savvy enough, you'd get on a list and get announcements in the mail. Ah, the good ol' days.

Unlike today, there was not a plethora of Dead-centric bands around every corner. You really had to have your ear to the ground. So, one day we heard the Turtles were going to be playing a far flung campground off The Grapevine called Templin Highway. We were game! We loaded up the car with a cooler full of sodas (too young to score booze), snacks and a bag of the ubiquitous super-sized M&M'S my mom kept in the house. Thanks Mom!

Needless to say we had some other psychoactive ingredients to get the party rolling as well.

We loaded up and hauled ourselves up the 45 minutes or so drive to a dusty and desolate campground in the San Gabriel Mountains. It was a festive scene when we arrived. Cars and tents, campers of all sorts and of course the ubiquitous sticker covered VW vans and buses. As the sun set, we made camp, ingested our sacraments and mixed it up with mostly people we knew from back in the Valley.

I began to notice there were several folks who were new to me. They were older and a little more gritty. One guy wearing a civil war rebel cap was pushing some powders, acting kind of belligerent. It wasn't unusual from what I had seen at the larger Dead shows, but it was more than I experienced in our local scene.

The band took the stage and it was on! People were shaking and grooving and kicking up dust. Folks were gathered at campfires around the perimeter. A good time was being had and we were getting ready for blast off.

Time seemed to stand still. I can still see, hear and feel it like it was yesterday. Whirling into the night, I felt like a painted native communing with the Gods!

Deep into the evening and feeling no pain, I looked up from my trance dance and noticed a new presence at the party…

Field Note: The Gold Claim — Moths in the Beer

Not long after Templin, the same appetite for off-the-grid magic sent us further out.

Craig Bogard invited us to play his “Gold Claim” somewhere north of L.A., a patch of dirt in old mining country with no buildings, no neighbors, and—crucially—no plan. We were Valley kids cosplaying frontiersmen. We brought amps, a couple of lights, and, in a stroke of advanced wilderness logistics, beer.

Food? Water? Shade?
We figured enthusiasm would cover it.

Night was gorgeous. The lights drew a halo of moths and every winged thing within five miles. They swarmed our faces, our strings, and especially our cups. We played and danced like no one could hear us for hundreds of miles—because no one could. It felt like we’d thrown a private festival on Mars.

Morning was the bill.

First light revealed that half the county’s insect population had died happy in our leftover beers. The only “water source” was a trickle locals warned was mercury-tainted from the mining days, so that was a hard pass. By 9 a.m., the heat hit triple digits. We stopped moving and tried to invent shade out of cymbal bags and speaker boxes while our gear baked and our mouths turned to cotton.

Packing up was hell. A little dawn moisture turned the soil into glue, then the wind powdered it into a fine dust that coated everything—cases, cables, fretboards, lungs. We thanked Craig like good guests, loaded slow, and pointed the convoy back toward civilization, vowing that *if we never saw another gold claim again, that'd be just fine.*

Aftermath

Taken together, Templin and the Gold Claim taught the same lesson two ways: joy and danger travel as a pair, and the edge between "epic" and "too much" is razor thin.

At Camp Templin, a Hells Angel named Rabbit pointed a gun at a campfire circle and walked away with a palm full of M&Ms instead of a story on the news. At the Gold Claim, we nearly baked ourselves—and our gear—to death chasing a desert fantasy.

Our innocence took a dent, our shell got tougher, and the tribe learned what it really means to take the music off the grid. We came back to the Valley a little older, a little warier, and a lot more aware that when you push past the edge of the map, you'd better respect what's out there waiting.

Chapter 11: First Club Nights — From Halloween to the Palomino

By late ’84, the backyards and street corners were starting to feel like reruns. We’d pushed the limits of garages, quads, Camp Templin, even a flatbed rolling down Ventura. If the band was ever going to grow up, we had to step into rooms with real lights, sticky floors, and sound systems that didn’t depend on Guitar Center’s return policy.

Our first official club gig came on Halloween, and it couldn’t have been a better fit.

The Wildest—Valley veterans who’d been rocking Dead covers long before us—pulled strings to get us on the bill at a small comedy club on Ventura Boulevard. The flyer read like a dare: a band with a name no one could spell, playing originals no one had heard.

Our tribe showed up anyway: tie-dye, skeleton masks, self-made paper-mâché turtle costumes. The stage was barely big enough for Chris’s kit and our amps, but we squeezed in and called it good.

We opened with “Scarlet Begonias” through a borrowed Altec PA that growled like an animal just woken up. At first the crowd looked skeptical—arms folded, waiting to see if we were just another group of kids who thought they could jam. By the second chorus, you could feel the room soften: heads bobbing, feet testing the floor.

When we dropped “Add A Little Spice,” born in living rooms and backyards, the place popped. For the first time, one of our originals hit under real lights and didn’t flinch. And that “Woo…” crowd-response section? That night is where it got born—and it became a vital part of “Spice” from then on.

Halloween proved we could hang indoors. The next question was: where else?

Behind It’s Only Rock ’n Roll Records

The next step wasn’t a fancy club—it was an alley (more of a backyard). **It’s Only Rock ’n Roll Records** was one of those shops that felt like church: posters layered three deep, bootlegs behind the counter, the smell of cardboard sleeves and incense. Somewhere along the way, my relationship with the store shifted from customer to co-conspirator, and we talked them into a show out back.

We built a stage out of milk crates and scrap plywood. Tie-dye sheets went up as a backdrop. The alley behind the shop—framed by cinderblock and neon spill—became our open-air theater.

We kicked off with “Scarlet,” then “Spice,” then “Nowhere to Turn,” with record-bin kids and curious pedestrians packing in between the dumpsters and the back door. Inside, people flipped through albums. Outside, we tried to sound like we belonged on those sleeves.

It was half guerrilla gig, half block party—the kind of night you only get when someone decides a back lot counts as a venue.

The Palomino Target

After Halloween and the alley stage, our ambition got sharper. There was one name that kept coming up: **The Palomino Club** in North Hollywood.

The Palomino wasn't just a bar—it was a shrine. The stories were everywhere: Willie Nelson, Emmylou Harris, Dwight Yoakam, all under that same neon horse. For a bunch of misfit Deadheads from the Valley, the idea of seeing our crooked turtle name on their chalkboard felt like science fiction.

We started hearing, "If you really want to be taken seriously, you've got to get into the Pal." Steve Miller—our manager—scribbled contact names and phone numbers into his spiral notebook like he was cracking a safe.

And then—like half the best Valley stories—the door didn't open through a big pitch. It opened through **Kinko's**.

Carl at Kinko's

Kinko's Copies wasn't just my paycheck—it was part of the Tur't'lz lifeline. We printed flyers there, ran last-minute jobs there, and lived under those fluorescent lights more than any sane person should.

That's where I met **Carl**.

He came in to prep the Palomino's weekly newspaper ads—copying band names, adjusting type, revising the layout over and over until it fit. From a distance it looks simple; up close it's constant precision: names, spacing, cut lines, deadlines.

Sometimes he had me cut stacks of tickets so they'd look right and be ready to use. He'd also make calendars—month-at-a-glance sheets with all the bands booked for the next run—trimmed, stapled, clean enough to hand out. It was basically the Palomino's nervous system, printed and assembled right there on our tables.

And I already loved the Palomino. I'd been to shows there. It was loud and alive and weirdly welcoming. I saw Albert Collins tear the roof off. I even saw Bruce Willis get up and jam. It was the kind of room where legends felt normal and surprises didn't feel rare.

So while we were talking and trimming and lining things up, I did what any hungry young musician would do: I told Carl I had a band—and that we'd love to play the Palomino sometime.

He didn't give me a speech. He didn't promise anything.

He just… got us an opening slot.

Walking into the Palomino with our gear felt like crossing an invisible border. The maple stage. The long bar. The low

ceiling stained with decades of smoke and music. Everything in that room seemed to whisper the same thing:

Don't waste this.

We weren't country. We weren't slick. Our name still looked like a typo. But we were inside—and it didn't become just "a gig."

Over time, the Palomino became a home base. Burt and his partner Mack started booking us not only there, but into rooms in that same orbit—often south of L.A.: San Juan Capistrano, San Diego, places where the load-in was long, the drive was longer, and you learned quickly what "professional" actually meant.

Eventually we were able to put on our own shows at the Palomino—invite guests, build a real night around our crowd, and have a familiar staff and a familiar room where the Hardshells could land.

Hard Lessons Under Neon

The Palomino also taught me that magic comes with consequences.

One night I got seriously sick mid-show—so sick I had to leave before I packed up my gear. The band packed up my stuff, but my cool AKG mic got left behind. I asked Carl about it later, but it wasn't in lost-and-found. He showed me a box full of abandoned microphones and said, "Which one is yours?"

Mine wasn't there.

That one hurt. It was a lesson: take care of your gear, take care of your body, and don't assume you'll get a second chance to retrieve something you left in the blur.

That night Gwen and Sam took me back to their place and tried to help, but I ended up needing a doctor: walking pneumonia. I'd never had to learn that lesson on a gig before, and I've never forgotten it.

One Door Opens Another

Because the Tur't'lz were now connected to the Palomino world, I could also book my other band—B*A*R*F*, my Zappa cover band—into rooms and nights that would've been harder to reach otherwise.

That's how it worked: one gig became another, one relationship became a path, one door opened two more.

Reflection

Those first club nights didn't erase our backyard DNA; they translated it.

Halloween proved our living-room energy could survive on a tiny stage. The alley behind It's Only Rock 'n Roll proved we could turn a non-room into a real one if the tribe was strong enough. And the Palomino—dreamed about, targeted, then reached in the least glamorous way imaginable (Kinko's

scissors and newspaper ads)—meant our misspelled turtle had wriggled into a place built for legends.

We were still loud, still rough, still too hard to handle for some people. But the jump had been made: from patios and parties to chalkboards and marquees.

And once we were inside the Palomino, another strange thing happened: we started realizing the rooms we'd been chasing… were rooms where things could happen.

Post-Gig Nights: Cheap Food and Loud Friends

Once we started playing real rooms, we also started living in the hours *after* the rooms. Load-out, pile into cars, chase whatever was still open, and keep the night going because it felt like the only time we all belonged to the same moment.

Most of the time, that meant Denny's—or whatever diner would take a loud pack of musicians at midnight or later. At first it was a treat. The gig was done, nobody had to be anywhere, and we were still all together—band, and usually the girlfriends too—sliding into a booth with that wired, post-show energy. Food and water, coffee refills, the stories getting retold like we were trying to lock the night into memory before it evaporated.

We even found a Denny's that had a bar, which made it feel like an extension of the gig: late-night dinner plus drinks, like we were adults with a professional routine.

But after a while, something started to sour for me. The behavior could get rude—sometimes mean—especially toward servers and staff. There was a lot of complaining about late-night service from people who were walking in exhausted and broke and then acting entitled anyway—sometimes without enough money to cover what they'd actually ordered.

One moment stuck with me because it was so casual, like it was nothing. I remember Flo—Robert Flores—biting straight through a stack of toast as we were leaving one diner late at

night. Not eating it. Just biting through it. I asked why he did that and he said, “So they won’t serve it to someone else.”

That little sentence landed in me like a weight. Not because it was the crime of the century—just because it was mean for no reason. Wasteful. Petty. A tiny power move against people who were just trying to get through a shift.

I started to feel it in my chest: this isn’t who I want to be. These people are working. We’re the ones choosing to show up late and loud. And nobody deserves to be treated like a punching bag because we’re tired or broke or full of ourselves.

So I stopped going out after. Not with a speech. Not with a confrontation. I just started going home.

Not every post-gig meal had that edge, though. We had our beloved spots too—the places that felt like heaven on our budget.

One of them was the Holiday Diner, a breakfast place up on Topanga Canyon Boulevard. After late nights we’d meet there for food and it felt massive and cheap in the best way: eggs any way, potatoes, gravy, biscuits—and fifty-cent Budweiser beers. It was paradise for broke musicians who felt like we’d just survived something together.

And it didn’t always end at the diner. Sometimes, full and happy, we’d roll on to somebody’s place—Larry’s house is the one I remember—drink a few more beers and then crash

wherever there was floor, couch, or spare corner. Sleep it off. Wake up and do it again when the next gig came.

Around that same era we also exploited Fatburger, because they would custom-make burgers I could eat and it was a treat without the meat. And for some of us there was the Tarzana Armenian Deli—the veggie rolled sandwich, the Veggie Delight. That thing was legendary. It wasn't glamorous, but it was ours.

Calaveras: The Trip That Was Supposed to Be a Dream

Somewhere in the middle of those early club nights, we got handed a story that sounded like pure myth: a run up to Calaveras County to see the Grateful Dead play with Santana… and then an after-party where members of the Dead were supposedly going to sit in with us.

For a band like ours, that wasn't just "cool." That was the kind of sentence you say out loud just to hear what it sounds like: *We're playing an after-party and members of the Grateful Dead might join us.*

We did what you do when you're young and hungry and reckless: we believed it.

I drove up in a rented van with Todd, my girlfriend at the time (I'm leaving her unnamed), and her sister. It was a long, ugly ride from L.A. to Calaveras—nothing like the romantic highway movie I'd imagined. But as we got closer, the

landscape started to change. The woods came in. There *was* beauty. And there was something strange and satisfying about being in the territory of Mark Twain—like the trip had earned a little literary dust on it just by passing through.

We got into the LSD early.

And right away I could feel how that was going to go: not like a colorful postcard, more like a magnifying glass. Whatever you're carrying gets turned up.

The show itself was a bummer for me—not because of the music, but because my girlfriend didn't seem especially interested in my company. Maybe it was nothing. Maybe it was in my head. But jealousy is a special kind of poison on acid: it doesn't stay one size. It grows. It invents evidence. It turns glances into verdicts.

After the show we ended up at the cabin—the "shack," really—out in the woods, where the after-party was supposed to happen. Our equipment was set up, which made it feel official for about thirty seconds.

But there were no guests. No Dead. No surprises. Nobody but the small group of people who'd traveled there believing the story.

There was a lawyer there—I didn't know him. He played some guitar, which should've been a relief. But he also had a briefcase, and I got it into my head that there was a gun in it.

That's where my paranoia kicked in like a switch.

In my mind, the briefcase wasn't just a briefcase. It was proof. The lawyer wasn't just some guy with a guitar. He was a threat. I convinced myself he had cocaine. I convinced myself he was after my girlfriend. I convinced myself she was disappearing on purpose. I was tripping hard enough that I couldn't tell the difference between a bad feeling and a fact.

Her sister didn't soothe it. If anything, she fed it—whether she meant to or not. Every shrug, every silence, every sideways look felt like confirmation. The cabin was remote. The woods were dark. And I started to think in these absurd, terrified loops: *I could get shot out here and left in the trees and who would even know?*

That's the thing about a bad trip—you're not just scared. You're *creative* about it.

Morning finally arrived like an exit sign. It was time to trek home, and I couldn't wait. Todd was exhausted, half-asleep, and I went into get-us-out-of-here mode. I loaded the van so we could leave as soon as he was ready.

While I was carrying Todd's cymbals out, one slipped out of the blanket they were wrapped in and landed squarely on my big right toe.

I didn't want to look. I already knew it hurt too much.

When I finally looked, the toe was still there—but the nail was cut and blood was everywhere. I found a towel, slapped on band-aids, pulled a sock over it, and kept moving because

the only thing I wanted more than medical attention was *distance*.

The ride home was brutal. My toe was throbbing—my gas-and-brake foot—and my brain was still replaying the night like a broken projector. The sister was getting on my nerves, not helping, and everything in me was pointed toward one decision: as soon as we got back, I was done.

And I was. I broke up with her the minute we got home and everybody was out of the van.

But life doesn't always cut clean. She asked for one more date—already planned—to her grandparents' house. I went. It was over, but it was civil. And somehow, in the way these things sometimes happen when you're young and tangled up in each other's circles, we stayed friends.

We always will be.

Chapter 12: The Palomino and Rick Rubin

By the time we played a real showcase at the Palomino, we already understood what that room meant—not because we'd memorized the legend, but because we'd earned our way into it. We'd hauled gear through those doors, learned the staff's rhythms, felt the way a Palomino crowd could swing from skeptical to loyal in one chorus.

"Don't Suck."

Spring '88, North Hollywood.
We pulled the van into the Palomino lot with our usual cocktail of optimism and stomach knots. The neon horse glowed above the door.

Burt, the booker, looked us over—tie-dye, weird spelling, no pedal steel in sight. He didn't ask about our influences. He didn't ask about our crowd size.

He just grunted:
"You boys weird or good?"
Steve grinned. "Both."
Burt nodded once. "Don't suck."
That was our contract.

At front-of-house was the Palomino sound-man. He ran the board like a man who'd seen every kind of band walk in and swear they were special. He gave us the look that said, Impress me.

We dragged in our battered gear: Herman's JC-120, Kenny's Tele, my Yamaha keys perched wherever they fit, Steve's bass rig humming low. The Hardshells filtered in, mixing with regulars in cowboy hats who had no idea what a Pur'p'l Tur't'l was supposed to sound like.

The Set

In the second set we played a killer rendition of "Hard to Handle." The twin Altec 15s roared, and the room hesitated—this wasn't straight country, and it wasn't what the regulars were expecting. But the groove wouldn't back down. By the second chorus, even the bartenders were pounding out rhythms on pint glasses. Steve's voice made everyone take notice.

We rolled from there into our own stuff: "Add a Little Spice," "Nowhere to Turn," "Go Ahead." Songs born in living rooms and backyards suddenly had Palomino air around them—every fill, every shout feeling like it counted twice.

And then, mid-set, we noticed him.

Back near the bar, half in the shadows: black beard, dark eyes, arms folded.

Rick Rubin.

Not clapping. Not smiling.
Just watching.

There's a special kind of adrenaline that hits when you realize the guy whose name is on records you own is standing in your room. We didn't get slick; we got focused. Count-offs tightened. Endings landed cleaner. We leaned harder into the parts that felt most like us.

When the last chord rang and the lights came up, we were sweating, buzzing, and weirdly calm. Whatever that had been, it was real.

The Card

One night after a set at the Palomino, a bearded guy slipped Steve a small cream-colored business card and disappeared into the blur before anyone could do the "so what does that mean?" dance.
The name on it was Rick Rubin.
And in Gothic type, two words that felt like a portal:

DEF AMERICAN.

Nothing concrete came of it. No meeting. No follow-up. And not long after, a different band took "Hard to Handle" to the bank.

In Steve's telling, the point was never cause-and-effect. It was the feeling that we'd wandered into rooms where things could happen. We didn't change our set because of it. We just played the next show.

The next show just happened to be the Palomino.

What It Meant

It's easy to write this story as disappointment: the famous producer who watched, nodded, and moved on.
But that's not how it felt.

What we got that night was recognition without a costume change. We hadn't turned into a slick country act, or a cleaned-up Dead clone, or whatever might've looked more marketable on paper. We walked into a legendary room, played like ourselves—odd spelling, too-long jams, duct-taped gear, all of it—and the guy whose taste we respected didn't laugh us off the stage.

He didn't rescue us. He didn't need to. That wasn't his job.

Our job was to show up, play hard, and tell the truth with the tools we had—and that night proved we weren't invisible.

Rubin's silence said what words couldn't:
you're not a joke,
you're not alone,
and if you keep going, you might just carve out a corner of the map with your own weird little shell on it.

The Second Time We Shared a Bill With Bob Weir & Kingfish

Some nights lodge in the band's bloodstream so deeply that decades later you can still taste the room—beer, sweat, cigarette ash, and that electric fog that hangs around a stage

when the music has been louder than your plans.
This was one of those nights.

It was our second show with Bob Weir and Kingfish, and from the moment we rolled in it felt like we'd stepped into a pocket of Deadhead heaven somebody accidentally left open for local weirdos like us.

The first one that year had been down in San Diego at the Bacchanal—epic sound. Clean, huge, forgiving. The kind of system that makes you play a little better because you can hear the truth of every note. That night was bliss.

But this second one? This one was the blast—the kind that isn't just about how the set goes. It's about what happens after, when the band stops being a band and turns back into a bunch of humans trying to metabolize the fact that they just shared oxygen with someone who helped write the map you've been following.

We ended up hanging—getting wasted with Bob, Matthew, and the rest of Kingfish, plus their crew. And the thing I still love about it is that the vibe wasn't "rock star and the peasants." It was just regular guys—talking, laughing, telling stories the way people do when the work is done and the adrenaline finally drains out.

At some point I got talking with Bob, and I had this weird little conversational key in my pocket. A friend of mine had shown me a photo of him with his arm in a sling—pretty sure Brian Gold took the shot (and Brian was a great man). I

asked Bob about it and it caught him off guard—like I'd asked about something human, not mythology. But then he just answered. Openly. Like I was John Barlow or an old friend who'd earned the right to ask a real question.

That's what I remember most: he didn't perform being Bob Weir for us. He just was a guy. A guy who'd been through things. A guy who'd played a thousand nights and still showed up for the next one.

As the night wore on and the edges got blurrier, I did the most Pur'p'l Tur't'lz thing imaginable: I gave him a Pur'p'l Tur't'lz T-shirt. Not a crisp one from a merch box. Not a clean one. Mine—the one I'd just worn on stage. My sweaty one. And he dug it. Like he was genuinely blown away. Which still makes me laugh, because there's nothing glamorous about a shirt that's done a full set in a club. But it felt like the most honest gift I could give: **Here's proof we were here. Here's our little turtle flag.**

Denise Ravitz Scher still talks about that night for one reason that never shows up on a flyer: Bobby spit on her. Not "gross, security-problem" spit—rock-and-roll front-row splash zone. She was right under him at the edge of the stage, close enough to see the spray catch the lights as he sang. "Greg Brown, in a good way," she always clarifies, laughing, like she's protecting the legend from the misunderstanding. She swears Chuck Berez got tagged too.

It sounds ridiculous on paper, but in the moment it felt like a baptism—proof you were in it, not watching from the sidelines.

There are a dozen other stories hanging off that night—little side quests from the band, our modest crew, and the Hardshells who always seemed to materialize wherever the music was loud enough to matter. If you asked ten of us what happened, you'd get ten versions—and all of them would be true.

What I know is: we played our hearts out, we got to stand in the same weather system as Bob Weir, and for a few hours the distance between fans and the source collapsed into something simple and human.

And we walked out into the night feeling like the universe had winked at our crooked little turtle name and said, **Yeah. You're in the story too.**

Tape note (Side A / Side B)
I labeled the cassette with the set split across both sides—our little proof-of-life artifact from the night—because a show this fun deserved to be saved in real time, not reconstructed later.

Field Notes & Interludes — The Palomino / Kinko's Orbit

Interlude — Calling Roger Dean

When we finished tracking *Hatched*, I decided to swing for the fences with the cover art.

I called Atlantic Records, charmed my way through a couple of switchboards, and somehow got a phone number for Roger Dean—yes, that Roger Dean. Then I used our company fax line (the only phone I could plausibly hog during work hours) to call England.
His wife answered, very polite, and said Roger was putting the children to sleep. A couple of minutes later, he came on the line himself. I couldn't believe it.
Olympus picked up.

I pitched him fast and breathless: we're the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz, just finished an album called *Hatched*, and—hear me out—you've never really painted turtles. Purple ones, hatching. Could be cool.

He was kind and direct. His first question:
"Are you like Yes?"
If we were chasing that exact sound, he wasn't interested—he didn't want to repeat himself or brand a copy of the thing he helped define. I told him the truth: we loved Yes, but we weren't Yes.

Then came budget. We didn't have one, really. I was hoping we could somehow raise what he needed, but Roger understood reality faster than I could dress it up. He didn't laugh; he steered.

"With your no-budget," he said, "talk to my friend Kai Krause—I'm buying him a house in Malibu. He's doing digital art in my vein. He might help."

That generosity—pointing a total nobody in a helpful direction—stuck with me. He also invited me to an exhibit of his work. We missed the opening, but later my brother Steve and I went and soaked up the show: cathedral islands, impossible archways, other worlds rendered with a draftsman's discipline.

I hung up more inspired than disappointed. Whether or not Roger drew our cover, he'd handed me the best possible brief:

Build a world bold enough to carry itself.

We doubled down on DIY. Racer drew psychedelic turtle shells hatching and the lettering for the album cover. I handled the typesetting and J-card layout, and we "published" *Hatched* one cassette at a time—litho, printers, scoring, the whole rickety process.

Roger Dean didn't paint our turtles, but his fingerprints are in the idea:

Build a world bold enough to carry itself.

Interlude — Meeting The Turtles (Kinko's → The Palomino)

During my six years working at Kinko's in Studio City, I had one of those very-Valley brushes with rock 'n' roll history.

One afternoon, Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan—better known as The Turtles—walked in and headed straight for the self-copy machines.

I couldn't resist. I walked over and said, "I'm in a band called the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz. I hope you guys won't sue us over the name."

Howard grinned. "We couldn't sue you. The names aren't exactly the same."

Ice broken.

I worked up the nerve to invite them to a Palomino show. It was half joke, half real hope. To my amazement, they actually showed up. They came backstage and introduced themselves to the rest of the band like it was the most normal thing in the world.

In my youthful naïveté, it never crossed my mind to invite them onstage. I figured, they won't know our songs, and we won't know theirs. Looking back, that was a missed opportunity the size of the entire Valley. A Turtles/Tur't'lz jam at the Palomino would've been instant legend.

I also couldn't help asking about their time with Zappa. They said it was good, but they were trying to move away from that association—Turtles gigs paid well for very few hours of work, and that was hard to argue with. I bragged that my Zappa cover band B*A*R*F* was going to play "Call Any Vegetable" (we never did). Howard just chuckled: "Oh, that old song!"

It's still one of my favorite memories from those years. And for the record, Howard Kaylan's film *My Dinner with Jimi* remains my all-time favorite music movie.
RIP Mark Volman—so cool, so funny.

Interlude — Phil Garris, the *Blues for Allah* Button, and a Kinko's Color Pass

I met Philip Garris at Kinko's the way only an '80s Valley story starts: too many band buttons on my jacket.
His girlfriend Lynn looked over and said, "He's wearing your button." I asked, "Which one?"—because I had about ten pinned on. She pointed to the *Blues for Allah* violinist. I said, "Oh, you have one of these too?" He smiled and said, "I'm the artist who painted that."

I was skeptical for about two seconds, then it got very real. Before long, I was helping him do color copies from the original painting so he could tweak and rework designs. He came by my house, met my mom, and for a while we pal-ed around the Valley. He signed prints for me. To this day, I think that *Blues for Allah* cover is one of the best record jackets ever made.

As Phil told it, the piece wasn't originally painted for the Grateful Dead; they later picked it up for the album. At the time he wasn't even a big Dead fan—he was more of a metal guy—and when he got invited to the big shows he was mostly into the scene and the party, not set lists.

He also said he painted that piece on LSD, and that it felt effortless—like his hand was being guided by something outside himself. Whatever the source, the result hit millions of Deadheads right in the mystic.

Kinko's was one of those strange crossroads in my life: flyers, zines, bands, random celebrities, and in this case the man behind an image I'd stared at for years. One minute you're clearing a paper jam; the next you're lining up a master painting on the glass, trying to make a shadow glow just right.

Interlude — Merl Saunders: The $50 Slot That Felt Like a Million

A couple years after that Rubin night—right around the time *Blues From the Rainforest* was making the rounds in our little Dead-adjacent universe—Burt called.

We loved Merl Saunders for a simple reason: Merl played with Jerry Garcia—our hero—and that put him in the inner circle of our musical religion. To us, Merl wasn't just "a great keyboard player." He was proof that the groove could be holy and funny, greasy and generous—all at once.

So when the phone rang and it was Burt, I didn't have a clever response ready.
He got right to it.

"Would you guys be willing to open for Merl Saunders?"
My brain stalled. I went almost silent—which, for me, is basically a medical event—then I managed: "Yes. We'd love to."

Burt paused like he had to deliver the bad-news part.
"I'm sorry… we can only pay fifty bucks for the opening slot."

We didn't care. Not even a little. Fifty dollars wasn't payment—it was a souvenir. We would've paid them to let us do it.

The Stage Was Already Spoken For

When we arrived, we realized this wasn't a "move some stuff around and make it work" kind of night. Merl's rig was already set—rack gear, keyboard station, the whole command center—planted front and center. And the Palomino stage isn't huge. It's intimate. Famous. Close enough that the room can feel a band's nerves.

We weren't allowed to move anything.

So we did what the Tur't'lz always did: we made it fit anyway. We angled amps. We negotiated inches like they were real estate. We found the one layout where nobody's gear—and nobody's destiny—got knocked over.

Meeting Merl

Backstage—or whatever counted as backstage in a room like that—we met Merl and his band before the show.
Merl asked, casual and kind, “What time are you guys supposed to play until?”

We told him: “Until ten.”

He smiled and said, basically, we could have more time because they weren’t going to be ready yet.

That tiny gesture tells you everything about him. No ego. No power trip. Just a working musician making sure another working band gets a real moment.

Merl was warm. Funny. Present—like he actually liked being there. And that loosened the knot in our stomachs.

The funny thing about the Palomino wasn’t just the legends who passed through—it was the way the room kept handing us tests we didn’t ask for. Some nights it was a famous producer watching from the shadows. Other nights it was a different kind of legend entirely: one who didn’t just listen, but made space.

Fifty Bucks, A Million Dollars

We played our set like it mattered—because it did.
And the crowd didn’t “support the opener” politely. They leaned in. We could feel it: the Palomino doing that thing it

does when it decides, for a few minutes, you belong here. Then Merl's band hit, and we loved them right back. Watching him play in that room after he'd treated us like humans—like peers—felt like getting blessed by the church we'd been standing outside of, pressing our faces to the stained glass.

That whole night was a win-win:
We got the Palomino.
We got Merl.
We got treated like musicians, not "the opener."
And we walked out knowing we'd just lived a story we'd be telling for the rest of our lives.

Sometimes the biggest breaks don't come with big money. Sometimes they come with fifty bucks, a tight stage you're not allowed to touch, and a legend who says, "Take a little more time."

Chapter 13: Southbound Miles & Magnetic Trails

The first time we pointed the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz van south, Los Angeles shimmered in the rearview—heat waves rising off the freeway, the Valley melting into asphalt hum. We weren't chasing a record deal; we were chasing horizons, new rooms, and the hope that our weird little shell could travel.

Ripples in the Map

By '88, our name started popping up in strange places. We traded gigs with a band called Half Way Home. Years later, their Wikipedia entry would casually mention us: *"...started playing gigs alongside Grateful Dead–style cover bands that were popular at the time in Los Angeles (e.g. The Pur'p'l Tur't'lz)."*

Just one line—but it proved the ripples had left the driveway.

The van sagged on worn shocks, money was always tight, and meals were a roulette of tacos, fries, and whatever someone's mom had packed "just in case." But every southbound mile confirmed the same thing: our little Valley tribe could spill into other cities and still make sense.

Southbound miles weren't glamorous. They were gas receipts, split tips, sore backs, and car stereos blaring our own hissy tapes. But they were also proof that the music wanted to travel—and that we could follow.

VENTURA THEATER: OUR FAVORITE ROOM IN THE WORLD

By the time Ron Russell was in the drum chair, we had something we'd been chasing since those early living-room jams: momentum that didn't feel imaginary. We weren't just "the band from the Valley" anymore. We were a real draw—enough to earn a **residency at the Ventura Theater**, the kind of room that made you play better just by standing on the stage.

It's hard to explain what that place meant to us without sounding like a greeting-card commercial, so I'll put it bluntly: it felt like home. The Ventura Theater was a stones-throw from a parking lot where we'd once been thrilled just to play for whoever wandered by. Now we were inside a real venue, with a real sound system, real lights, and real nights that had a beginning, a middle, and a sweaty, beautiful end.

We got to open for some legitimately cool acts—**Hot Tuna**, **David Lindley**—the kind of names that made us shut up for once and double-check we'd heard the booker right. And at least one night we got to **headline a Dead Head Night**, which for us was like being handed the keys to the church we'd been sneaking into since high school.

A SMALL TOUR THAT PROVED A BIG POINT

The Ventura Theater stretch also pushed us into a tiny run that, on paper, looked like the start of "touring":

- Ventura Theater
- **Borsodi's in Santa Barbara**
- a small club in **San Luis Obispo**

And honestly—we did really well. Crowds, good energy, the band sounding like itself. But the truth is: constant touring was never going to be our thing. We loved the *idea* of the road. We loved the stories. What we didn't love was the grind underneath it—the logistics, the exhaustion, the way "adventure" turns into "Where are we sleeping?" by 2 a.m.

ISLA VISTA: THE ALLEY GIG THAT NOBODY ORDERED (BUT EVERYONE ATTENDED)

Santa Barbara also gave us one of the strangest shows of our lives—Isla Vista, really. We were invited to play for college students, and when we arrived nobody seemed to claim responsibility for hiring us… and yet the party was clearly happening.

They ran a power cord out of a house window like they were feeding electricity to a raccoon, and they set us up **in an alleyway**. Not a stage. Not a yard. An alley. Which sounds terrible until you remember: we were the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz. If it had power, we could make it a venue.

The party got hearty fast—people appeared from nowhere, like somebody rang a dinner bell for the entire neighborhood. We played, we laughed, we leaned into the absurdity. Later we slept in random people's houses—

welcoming strangers with spare floors and spare couches. I ended up in a little kid's bed, trying not to break anything, wondering how this counted as "a gig" and also knowing it was exactly the kind of gig we'd tell stories about forever.

PEOPLE'S PARK: DAYLIGHT, GOOD VIBES, AND A DIFFERENT KIND OF MAGIC

Somewhere in that same era we played **People's Park** one afternoon to a great reception—daylight instead of midnight, faces instead of silhouettes, a crowd that felt more like a community than a "scene." It reminded me that not every show needed chaos to feel alive. Sometimes the magic was simply: we showed up, we played, and people actually listened.

KXLU: TWO HOURS LIVE WITH JOHNNY V

Around this time we also did something that felt completely different from our usual ecosystem of noise, sweat, and crowd reaction: we performed live on the radio at **KXLU**, hosted by **Johnny V**—a connection that came through my Kinko's world.

"Live in studio" sounds glamorous until you realize what it actually meant: we were **spread out in different rooms**—some of us in hallways, some behind doors, everybody positioned wherever a microphone could fit. We could barely see each other. It was like trying to be a band while playing hide-and-seek.

And there was no crowd. No Hardshell roar. No “Wooo!” coming back at us. Just headphones, red lights, and the weird awareness that your mistakes don’t evaporate into the air—they go straight into the broadcast.

Which, of course, made it hilarious.

We leaned into it. We had fun. We treated it like an experiment, the same way we’d treated those early jams—except now the experiment was happening **on the air for two hours**, and the audience was whoever happened to be tuned in.

It was unique. It was awkward. It was absolutely worth doing. And it belongs in this story because it proves something important: by then, we weren’t only surviving in garages. We were doing real band things—our version of “real,” anyway—without losing the crooked grin that made us *us*.

Chapter 14: The Fans — Hardshells

Every band says it has fans. We had something closer to a tribe. They called themselves the Hardshells, and without them the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz would've been just another Valley band that burned hot and vanished.

Born in Living Rooms

It started small: friends of friends crowding into Ethel's den, passing pipes and burritos while we rattled the walls. But the scene grew its own infrastructure—flyer-runners, couch providers, bootleggers, grill operators, impromptu security, amateur therapists.

They weren't just listening. They were building it with us.

The Sunday Ritual

Sundays became sacred.
We'd grill chicken, play half a set, then collapse on couches for *The Simpsons*. Miss one Sunday and you'd spend the week enduring replayed punchlines about dropped drumsticks, half-burnt burgers, and someone's spectacularly bad trip.

These weren't rehearsals—they were family dinners with feedback as the soundtrack.

Winston's and the Ocean Beach Crew

By the time we rolled into Ocean Beach, San Diego, the shell had stretched south.

Winston's was a funky, wood-paneled club a block from the water. The first night we played there, it felt like home immediately: Deadhead vibe, bare feet, cold beer, that easy OB mix of drifters and lifers.

Our blend of covers and originals landed like a wave that happened to arrive right on time.

After one set, the manager pulled us aside and asked, "What do you guys make on Monday mornings?" We mumbled something about day jobs. He smirked.
"I'll pay you more to play Sunday nights."

Suddenly, we were Winston's Sunday house band. Two hotel rooms, a rented cargo truck, gas money—and the sweetest benefit of all: we could call bosses on Monday and quit, claiming the rarest excuse in the Valley:
My band pays more than you do.

Those Sunday drives became rituals—a rolling frat house in a cargo truck, gear stacked to the ceiling, jokes and smoke bouncing off metal walls.

Meeting Dawn

It was at Winston's that I first saw Dawn.
She was on the dance floor with a date but kept looking my way between spins. At one point she leaned in and said:
"I'm with this guy now… but I won't be later."
I just nodded—cool.

An hour later, she and the guy were arguing. By the end of the set, she'd ditched him and followed us back to the hotel. The band razzed me mercilessly while we found a quiet spot and started kissing, but I didn't care. When we finally exchanged numbers, it felt like more than a road fling.

At the next gig, I stayed at her place before and after the show. It was awkward in that new-person way at first, but she put me at ease.

Over New Year's, we spent a week together, even visiting her birth mom and mom's boyfriend in Marin. They welcomed us like family—holiday snacks, tickets to see the Dead on December 30th, and long soaks in their hot tub.

We left her cockatiel Ishtar with them for safekeeping, then later Dawn asked me to take Ishtar back to L.A. until she could pick him up. That bird became another saga, but Dawn quickly became woven into mine. Before long, I asked her to move in with me.

That decision pulled me out of my parents' house—and eventually north, to Santa Cruz, and later to Jenny. Music gave me Dawn, and Dawn quietly re-routed my life.

Family, Not Fame

That was Hardshell magic in a nutshell. Fans weren't just bodies in a crowd—they became friends, lovers, allies, chosen family. They carried amps, ran cables, defended gigs when punks tried to crash them, and offered floors and couches when we were broke.

We didn't "make it" by industry standards. But through the Hardshells—and people like Dawn—the band became more than a sound. It became a network of lives braided together. The Hardshells proved the shell was never hollow. It was full of people, stories, and connections that still echo long after the last note fades.

Interlude — A&M: The Day the Idea Hatched (Don Ray Phinney)

Through Steve—and through Ethel, who seemed to have a sixth sense for putting the right people in the room—we met a musician named **Don Ray Phinney**.
Don walked in talking big. Not fake big, exactly—more like the kind of big that's half résumé and half smoke machine. He said he already had a record. Said he was "the real deal." And he had a proposition:
He wanted the **Pur'p'l Tur't'lz** to record a few of his songs as his backing band.

It wasn't our kind of music. Not even close. But in those days, a gig was a gig—and we were still learning the difference between jam and job. So we made a counter-offer like a band that had been burned before:

"If we're going to do this, you pay us to rehearse first. Then you pay us to record."

Don agreed.

The rehearsals: promises, fantasy, and the missing "perks"

We set about learning the tunes. They didn't feel like us—less wild-card, more straight-line—but we did what we always did: we worked the parts until they were tight.

During rehearsals, Don kept painting the picture of how this was going to go. He described it like a rock-'n'-roll banquet: wine and dine, cocaine and women, the full cartoon of "big time."
None of that showed up.
What *did* show up—on the day of the session—was a **hired guard**.

A guard.
To protect our "secret" recording at **A&M**.
A&M: the first real studio any of us ever saw
Walking into A&M felt like stepping onto another planet.

Up to that point, "recording" for us meant whatever we could patch together: two-track live recordings, a four-track Tascam cassette, mics that weren't always matched, levels that weren't always sane. We were used to controlling the chaos because the chaos was ours.

A&M was the opposite: controlled, expensive, quiet in a way that made you hear your own heartbeat.
I'd asked ahead of time for a piano and an organ, thinking I'd get something reasonable—something in the range of my world.

What appeared was a **twelve-foot Steinway grand**.
It was breathtaking. It was also intimidating as hell.
I'd been a keyboard player, not a pianist—my hands came up on synth action, on lighter touches, on a Yamaha DX7 and

whatever else I could drag into a room. The Steinway's touch was gorgeous… and heavy. It felt like a thoroughbred horse that could sense fear.

And the clock was running. Money was burning. Everyone was watching.

Tracking: one or two takes, like professionals (mostly)

We cut the basic track as a whole band. We did what we did: locked in, pushed forward, played like a unit.
Todd's drumming—Todd being Todd—did not go unnoticed in the control room. At one point I overheard something that still makes me laugh, because it was so studio-people:

"I didn't know he was going to do a snare roll!"

Welcome to the big leagues, where a snare roll is a committee decision.

But to our credit, we were prepared. We played through the songs professionally and, if my memory's right, got what they needed in a take or two. No drama. No meltdown. No "let's do it again just because." We were efficient—mostly because we were terrified.

Then the room changed.

The Steinway moment: center stage, all eyes

They cleared the studio, moved the Steinway into the center of the room, and mic'd it up with microphones that looked like museum pieces—gear that cost more than our entire rehearsal life.

The only piano I was used to was the baby grand Ludwig at my parents' house—warm, familiar, forgiving. This Steinway felt like it could expose your soul.
And now it was just… me.

All eyes. Red light. The sense that every second was expensive.

I took a breath, found the part, and played it—again in one or two takes—and when it was done, the relief hit me like gravity returning. I hadn't embarrassed myself. I hadn't wasted their time. The giant thing had cooperated.

I survived the Steinway.

The Hammond setup: a thousand controls and one lifeline

Then they cleared the room again and rolled in a **Hammond organ with a Leslie speaker**.
If you've never sat down at a real Hammond in a real room, here's the truth: it looks like an aircraft cockpit designed by a

mad scientist. Sliders, knobs, pedals, switches—options for days.

They asked if I was ready.

I moved a few things around, found the **Leslie speed switch**—the one thing I knew I'd need—and we were off.

Again: one or two takes. I got my part down and felt that same wave of *whew* wash over me.

We were doing it. In a real studio. With real gear. Without falling apart.

Don's vocals: the only one who wasn't ready

Then Don did his vocal overdubs.

And here's the part where the reality didn't match the talk. He'd been the one selling the whole thing, but in the booth he sounded like the least prepared person in the building. In rehearsal, he'd carried himself like a headliner. In the studio, he felt… unfocused—like he'd spent his best energy on the story of being big time.

Maybe he'd already had the party he kept promising us. Maybe he was nervous. Maybe studio headphones are the great equalizer.

Whatever it was, we backed him as well as we could. We did our job.

And to his credit, he paid us.

The money: not fortune—fuel
Between rehearsal pay and the A&M day, it came to **a little over three grand**—the kind of money that doesn't change your life, but *does* change your thinking.
Not "quit your job" money.

But band money. The kind of money that makes you look at your own songs and think:

Wait a second.
What if we did this for us?

We didn't walk out of A&M with a record deal. We didn't get the cocaine and women Don predicted. We didn't get champagne.

What we got was something better:
We got a glimpse of how the machine works—and proof that we could walk into a room like that and not get crushed.

And somewhere in that intimidation, in that Steinway weight, in that Hammond cockpit, in that snare-roll comment drifting from the control room…

An idea was about to hatch.

The second session: fixing the intro, breaking the spell

There was one more chapter to the Don Ray Phinney saga—and it's the part that taught me the most about how recordings actually *become* recordings.
After A&M, Don hired me alone to go to another studio in the Valley and **re-record the piano intro**. A smaller room, a simpler setup, and just me trying to match the spirit of that big-night take without the big-night energy. He paid me **around $300** for the overdub session, which felt fair—another little envelope that said, this is real work.

But then came the twist: Don went back in and **re-cut his vocal again**… and somehow it landed worse than what he'd done at A&M. Not "different." Not "alternate." Worse in the way you can't un-hear once you've heard the earlier version.

And that newer vocal became the final release.
That's when the spell broke for me—in a useful way. Because it proved something I didn't fully understand yet:

A great studio doesn't guarantee a great record.
Preparation does. Taste does. Judgment does.
Sometimes the best performance is the one you already have—and the smartest move is to stop touching it.

Still, I don't regret any of it. The A&M day gave us the mountaintop. The Valley overdub day gave us the lesson: you can't talk your way into a great take.
And the money—between the full band session and my later overdub—was enough to make the band look at each other and think:

What if we put that energy into our songs?
Because if we could survive A&M… we could make something of our own.

From the Archive (Steve Bryant)

"This was a great thing that fell in our lap… we got paid to rehearse, and then record at A&M… we made over three grand so we started saving to record our own."

Track / Archive Note

"You'll Be Alright (A&M Mix)" — Don Ray Phinney backed by Pur'p'l Tur't'lz

This is the original A&M mix from the night of the session—the first time any of us recorded in a major studio. Greg Brown played Steinway grand piano and Hammond organ + Leslie. After A&M, Don later hired Greg to overdub a new piano intro at a smaller Valley studio (paid ~$300), and he later re-cut his vocal again; that later version became the

final release. This A&M mix captures the band as we sounded in that room, that night.

Personnel:
Steve Bryant — bass
Ken Bellew — guitar
Greg Herman — guitar
Todd Myers — drums
Greg Brown — Steinway piano, Hammond organ

SoundCloud (A&M mix):
https://soundcloud.com/greg-brown-37/youll-be-alright-a-m-mix
We didn't leave A&M with a deal. We left with proof: we could walk into a real studio, keep our heads, and get the job done. And once we'd seen what a "real" session looked like, we couldn't unsee it—on the drive home, the talk quietly shifted from Don's songs to our songs. The idea of ***Hatched*** *wasn't a dream anymore. It was a plan.*

Track/Archive Note (optional, for the SoundCloud entry)
"You'll Be Alright (A&M Mix)" — Don Ray Phinney backed by Pur'p'l Tur't'lz

This was my first-ever session in a major recording studio: A&M Records. Pur'p'l Tur't'lz were hired to back Don Ray Phinney. I played a Steinway grand piano and a Hammond

organ with Leslie—both way out of my league at the time. This is the original mix done the night of the session.

Personnel:

- Steve Bryant — Bass
- Ken Bellew — Guitar
- Greg Herman — Guitar
- Todd Myers — Drums
- Greg Brown — Steinway Piano, Hammond Organ

Steve Bryant (cassette diary):

*"Don Ray Phinney paid us to rehearse, then paid us to record at **A&M**. Unreal studio. Don talked big—band delivered. We walked out with over **three grand** and a new idea: record Pur'p'l Tur't'lz for real."*

Chapter 15: Studio Days — Part I: *Hatched* and the Tape Machine

By 1989, we'd filled enough garages, basements, and backyards with sound to know we wanted something permanent. The live cassettes were great, but they were blurry snapshots. We wanted a portrait.
We wanted a record.

Robbie's Place

The miracle arrived as Robbie Weaver's home studio in Woodland Hills. "Home" is misleading—this was a first-class room tucked into suburbia. Lava lamps in the corners, cables neatly coiled, racks of gear that looked like they'd fallen off a truck from Capitol Records.
At the center sat the Tascam 38 reel-to-reel—our ticket from rumor to artifact.

Engineer John Cevatello ran the board. Where we were chaos, he was calm. With John at the controls and Robbie's studio wrapping us in colored light, it felt like stepping through a portal. For once, the dumps we usually rehearsed in didn't define us.

This was the real deal.

The Sessions

We walked in with a stack of originals that had survived the gauntlet of backyards and Sunday porch tests:

- "Peace of Mind" — Kenny's anthem, finally blooming with real reverb
- "Havin' Fun" — our philosophy squeezed into a sing-along
- "Far Away" — Herman's dream chords drifting through Leslie shimmer
- "Little Time Left" — Steve's urgent, bass-driven plea
- "Add a Little Spice to Life" — burrito-wrapper inspiration turned crowd chant
- "In-Between Nowhere" — fragile, raw, caught in a single take
- "Foolin' Yourself" — one of Kenny's bittersweet rockers
- "Running for the Moon" — closer that felt like it could spin forever

Todd Myers drove the sessions from behind the kit. Where Chris gave us the earliest thunder, Todd brought a heavier, more focused fire. His fills were crisp, his kick tight, his energy relentless—the kind of drumming that pushed songs into a higher gear. After one particularly fierce pass, Kenny leaned back and said, "That's the fire we've been waiting for."

Herman's JC-120 hummed under isolation blankets. Steve's bass rig shook the floor. My Yamaha keys perched on whatever stand we could spare but finally cut through the mix.

For two solid days we lived in that room—overdubbing sparingly, arguing over takes, laughing when somebody botched a lyric. The best magic stayed close to how we played live.

"In-Between Nowhere" arrived whole in one pass. John just said, "Don't touch it."

"Spice" exploded with that signature "Wooo!" that audiences loved. When we played it back through Robbie's monitors, we finally heard what we'd been chasing: not just noise, but songs.

Neon Shells

Visually, Racer did most of the heavy lifting on *Hatched*—and I don't just mean "she made cool art." Tracy was a main artist for us in the real, tangible sense: logo maker, album-cover artist, and a working craftsperson who understood production as part of the art. I loved working with her on *Hatched* because it wasn't only a creative relationship—it was also print work, cover work, and the physical problem-solving of turning an idea into an object people could hold.

Tracy brought that neon-shell attitude to life—the purple motif, the airbrushed glow, the vibe that said *this is handmade but it's not amateur*. I handled the typesetting and J-card layout, then ping-ponged around the Valley and L.A.: getting cards scored, sitting in on cassette mastering, working with printers, approving finals, chasing the tiny details that nobody sees until they're wrong. But *Hatched* wasn't just "Racer made art and I did layout." We were both involved in the cover production—decisions, adjustments, the whole grind of making it real.

And Tracy being Tracy, she didn't stop at the cassette. She screened a few one-off shirts and sweatshirts for me over the years—actual Pur'p'l Tur't'lz swag with the kind of beauty you only get from a person who cares about ink the way musicians care about tone.

$27.43

A few weeks later, a royalty check arrived: $27.43.
Steve framed it like a trophy and scrawled one word under the glass:
VALIDATION.

It wasn't the money. It was proof that *Hatched* wasn't just ours anymore—it was out in the world, hissing through tape decks and Walkmans, alive in bedrooms and cars we'd never see.

The songs weren't perfect. Tempos rushed, vocals cracked, mixes leaned raw. But that was the point. For the first time, the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz had an album.

Something real. Something no one could take away.

"In Robbie's studio, we didn't escape our chaos—we crystallized it. And in Todd's hands, the beat finally hit hard enough to carry us forward."

Field Note — Racer's Garage Press & the Dynacord Disaster

We even played at Tracy's house one afternoon once—Ron Russell era. We loved Racer, so of course we were glad to do it. It felt like the tribe playing in the tribe's living room, the way it was always supposed to be.

I brought a fairly new Leslie simulator made by Dynacord—a pricey rackmount unit that, to me, felt like a serious "step up." It had indented trim pots on the back—one of those designs that quietly assumes nobody will ever touch it without a plan. While we were playing, I asked the keyboard player from Calvin's band (Urban Dread) if he'd help me dial it in—just tweak it until it sounded best in the room.

He grabbed a screwdriver, reached around, and snapped the potentiometer.

That little *click*—that soft, dumb mechanical failure sound—was the whole afternoon turning into a bill. The simulator was broken. Didn't work. Done.

I eventually found someone who could repair it, and while it was on the operating table I asked for a modification: it was mono in / stereo out, and I wanted stereo ins *and* outs. They built another circuit, did the mod, and the bill got heavy—one of those "pay it like a ransom if you ever want to see your precious gear again" situations. I paid it, because of course I did. When you're chasing a sound, you convince yourself it's always worth it.

That era also marked something else: Steve and I kept adding equipment as the band grew. At one point we both had huge refrigerator-sized road cases full of rack gear—his for bass, mine for keyboards. They were great tools and absolutely helped our sound get bigger and better… but they were also brutally heavy and caused endless hassle. There are more capers in that chapter of the story—including a broken-window episode in my van that still makes me wince—but the theme was simple:

Our ambition had weight. Sometimes literally.

Chapter 16: Studio Days — Part II: Outtakes, Epics, and Improv (1989–1991)

The Haire Pharmerz — Steve & Me, Two Mics, One Strap, and Rock Bottom (1989–1990)

Somewhere along the line, Steve and I got it in our heads that we should be our own band—just the two of us—outside of the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz orbit.

It sounds obvious now, but it wasn't what we did. We were used to the whole circus: people, amps, drums, personalities, chaos, and the big, loud safety net of a full band. But Steve and I hung out constantly. We played and sang together all the time—just naturally, the way you do when you're young and music is basically the air in the room.

And we weren't alone.

Sam and Gwen were always around. Always. They'd show up and suddenly the house would turn into harmonies—songs floating through the kitchen, the living room, the hallway—like that's just what homes did back then. So this "duo" idea didn't start as a business plan. It started as something we were already doing every night, and one day we just said: let's put a name on it and book gigs.

Steve called it **The Haire Pharmerz**—a name that felt like a band you'd see on a flyer stapled to a phone pole at 2 a.m. It made us laugh, which meant it was perfect.

Then the universe did what the universe always does when you think you have time: it sped everything up.

One summer I was on vacation in Monterey, staying at my friend Tammy's house in Pacific Grove, trying to pretend I was relaxing. Steve calls and tells me we're opening for **Timothy Leary**—yes, that Timothy Leary—in less than a month. The sentence didn't even make sense in my brain at first. Opening for Timothy Leary? As a duo? With a set we hadn't built? With zero rehearsals?

I hung up and had the immediate realization: I need a guitar right now.

So I did what any responsible musician on vacation would do: I found a guitar in an antique store. Forty bucks. A nylon-string that looked like it had already lived through three or four strange decades. But it was a guitar, and it was mine, and it was good enough.

When I got back to the Valley, I heard **Frank Zappa** was doing a signing at Crown Books in Studio City. I got in line like everybody else—hundreds of fans, that particular Zappa-devotee energy in the air. I bought his book. I brought my beat-up, newly-acquired nylon-string with me because… well, because I'm me.

When I finally got up to Zappa, he looks at the guitar and says, deadpan:

"What do you want me to write on it?"

I said, “How about ‘**My Guitar Wants To Kill Yo Mama**.’”

He pauses and goes, “That’s a lot to write.”

Then—without missing a beat—he writes the whole thing across my cheap little guitar in Sharpie and signs it **FZ** like it’s nothing. He signs my book too.

That’s one of those moments that pins itself to your life. Great moments. You don’t even know what to do with them, so you just hold them up and stare at them for a while.

I go across the street to the parking lot to show my friend Bruce Grossman. I’m standing there like a kid showing off a prize when a limo pulls up, window rolls down, and the driver says:

“Does it play better now?”

And I said, “Definitely.”

They told me to spray it or it would rub off. (Which is the kind of practical advice you only get from strangers orbiting a Zappa signing in a limo.)

So now I’ve got a $40 antique-store guitar with a Frank Zappa Sharpie inscription, and I’m supposed to be ready to debut a duo act in front of a packed room.

Here’s the thing: by this time, Steve and I felt like rock stars. Not in the “we’re famous” way, but in that internal way—like

the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz had given us momentum and confidence and a sense that we could walk into any room and make something happen.

Except… we didn't rehearse.

As the debut got closer, I got very sick—throat, cough, the kind of illness that makes your voice feel like it belongs to someone else. By the time I was even remotely functional, we had one practice. One. And it wasn't even a good one.

But we were still confident, because confidence is free when you're young.

The night of the gig (at **The Breakaway**—I want to say Santa Monica, but the truth is it's all a blur of headlights and posters and nerves), the place was packed. Timothy Leary was nowhere to be found. We were just supposed to play our set and exist in the glow of the idea.

To calm down, I had a few tokes and some drinks.

I got really stoned. I was still sick. I was nervous. I walked onstage full of hope and rock fantasies.

And then we bombed.

Not a gentle "that wasn't our best" kind of bomb. A full-on, career-lifetime, body-memory bomb.

Early in the first song, my guitar somehow came unfastened from the strap and fell to the floor. That sound—wood and

embarrassment—still lives in my nervous system. I recover it, try to keep going, and then the pickup falls off because it's basically held on with putty and optimism, and my roughness wasn't compatible with either.

Our voices weren't locking. We weren't harmonizing. Nothing was landing. It was like watching your own slow-motion crash from the inside.

It was the worst show I remember ever playing. Ever.

That night became my personal rock bottom. Not in a dramatic "quit music forever" way—but in the way that resets your standards.

I made a vow right there: I will never play without being properly ready again.

Afterward, I told Steve I'd never do that again. I was mortified. I wanted to crawl into the guitar case and zip it shut.

Steve, in his Steve way, tells me—casually, as if he's ordering a burrito—"We've got another gig."

So we practiced. A little more. Then a little more. We learned how to be a duo: how to carry a room with two instruments and two voices, how to recover when something goes sideways, how to pace a set, how to be funny without hiding behind it.

And it didn't happen overnight. It took months—like learning how to walk again, except the ground is a stage and people are watching.

After about nine months, we could entertain a group of people without totally sucking. Then we could entertain them and actually be good. Then we could walk into a room with two mics and a plan and leave it better than we found it.

We played places like the Coconut Teaszer, and one night we ended up in the bushes smoking a bowl with **Wavy Gravy**—which is one of those sentences that only makes sense if you lived in Los Angeles at the right weird angle.

He looks at us and says, "Is this what it's come to?"

And we're like: "Yeah!"

Because it was. That was the whole point. You're in L.A., you're making the scene, you're playing gigs, you're learning how to do it the hard way—one strap failure at a time.

The Haire Pharmerz didn't start because we were ready.
It started because we weren't.
And then we became ready.

We didn't set out to build a legend. We set out to survive two microphones and our own nerves. The Haire Pharmerz was the place we learned professionalism the hard way—by failing in public, then coming back sharper.

Field Note: The Haire Pharmerz (Two Tur't'lz Without the Shell)

The Haire Pharmerz were me and Stevie Bryant—two guys known (at least to our little world) as the **keyboard player** and **bass player** in the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz—deciding to become a **nylon-string acoustic guitar duo**.

It was ridiculous on paper, which is exactly why it was perfect. We felt free. No amps, no volume war, no "shell." Just songs, nerve, and the willingness to sound a little exposed.

Our friend **Mike Giangreco**, a New Yorker and a great promoter/booking agent, booked us as much as we wanted. The gigs were short and loose, and we'd get paid in some mix of **money, food, and booze**—which matched the spirit of the whole thing. We miss you, Mike.

We also recorded a set of originals in one long afternoon into evening on my **Tascam multi-track cassette machine**. The recording is rough, but the enthusiasm is real. The session also included songs by **Sam and Gwen**—phenomenal writers and singers (they fronted **Realize** in their best era), and being around their songs honestly made ours sound better.

It wasn't polished. It was playful. It was vulnerable. And it was ours.

Archive note: Early Haire Pharmerz recordings / set staples (1989–1990)

1 · Haire Pharmerz @ Bogart's — 8-11-89

2 · Haire Pharmerz @ The Breakaway — 9-22-89

3 · Haire Pharmerz — 2-1-90 / 9-22-89 (collection tape)

4 · Samantha Olson & Gwen Cassella with The Haire Pharmerz

Emmett Chapman, Laurel Canyon, and the Driveway Next Door

The first time I ever saw a Chapman Stick up close wasn't on a record sleeve or from the back of a club—it was at the US Festival.

Steve Wozniak had this technology tent full of vendors and futuristic gear, and one of the stations was the Chapman Stick. I'd already seen the instrument in the wild—Tony Levin playing one with King Crimson around 1980—so I knew *what* it was. But this was the first time I got to really understand it as a physical thing: the size, the fretboard, the way it invited both hands to become a whole rhythm section.

They had a line. When it was your turn, you could put on headphones, hold the Stick, and try it yourself.

And Emmett Chapman was right there.

That alone was impressive—this wasn't a distant inventor name on a brochure. He was present, attentive, and completely grounded. The kind of guy who didn't just build an instrument—he built a world around it.

I wanted one immediately. Of course I did.

Emmett had a flyer that said if you were serious, you could visit his studio and try different instruments out. So I did. I drove up to this cool place high on Laurel Canyon Boulevard. Emmett welcomed me in, set me up, and gave me space to explore—patient, kind, and totally unpretentious.

The truth was, I didn't know what I was doing yet, and I definitely didn't have that kind of money. I thanked him, told him how blown away I was, and left with my brain on fire.

He invited me to see him in concert, and I went. Then I did what musicians do when they fall in love with a piece of gear they can't afford: I started hunting for one used like it was a missing limb.

Eventually I found a Stick through Walter Woods for $400—an unbelievable deal, and the first time it felt like the instrument might actually become part of my life.

Around that time, Steve started getting a little jealous of the whole Emmett Chapman thing. Not mean jealous—more like *my best friend can't stand that I have a new obsession he isn't fully part of yet.*

So we made a plan to see Emmett together.

We drove out to a show in Malibu that Steve could make, and then—classic Steve—he forgot his driver's license. The jazz club wouldn't let him in. No exceptions.

So there he was, sitting outside near the ocean, listening to waves under the night sky, bummed out—once again missing Emmett play the Stick. We left after the first set so he wouldn't have to sit out there alone all night.

And then something happened that still feels like the universe cracking a grin.

Emmett moved to the Valley.

Not just near us—right next to Steve's house.

Same driveway.

From that point on, Emmett wasn't just "the inventor of the instrument I admired." He and his wife, Yuta, became part of our world. We actually became friends—real friends. The kind who end up spending Christmas Eve together.

And over the years, Emmett even joined our band from time to time—this legendary musician casually showing up like it was the most normal thing in the world.

After Steve passed, Emmett came to me and asked, gently, if he could play at Steve's memorial.

Of course he could.

Emmett did the opening set, and then he sat in with the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz for the whole thing. Before we went on, he said to me, "I'll just follow along. I'll try not to get in the way."

I told him, "Play whatever you feel. Go for it."

I wasn't going to let anybody play bass that night—Steve was the one we were memorializing. But Emmett didn't *replace* anything. He fit in perfectly—like a voice joining a choir, not taking a solo someone else earned.

Sometimes life hands you these strange, impossible threads: you see an instrument in a tech tent, you meet the guy who invented it, you try to buy one and can't, you chase it for years… and then the inventor ends up sharing a driveway with your best friend.

And when your best friend is gone, that same inventor shows up with love, humility, and music—right when it matters most.

The Zappa Detour: B*A*R*F*

Toward the very end of the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz, I started another band.

A Frank Zappa cover band.

I loved Frank's music, even though at the time I only knew how to play a couple of his simpler songs. But Zappa had this magnetism—humor and danger and discipline all braided together—and I wanted to go there. I recruited friends. We took it seriously enough to rehearse hard, and not seriously enough to understand what we were getting ourselves into.

I was also afraid of being sued.

If you grew up with Zappa records, you know what I mean: those warnings on the albums read like legal documents. Frank felt like the kind of guy who might show up in court because you played the wrong chord.

So I did the only thing that made sense in my brain:

I called his hotline.

818-PUMPKIN.

A real person answered. I asked if we had a Zappa cover band, would we get sued?

They said: **No—We'd be honored.**

That single sentence freed the whole thing.

We became:

B*A*R*F* (Frank Zappa covers)

- **Keys:** Greg Brown
- **Bass:** Stephen Bryant
- **Drums:** Tony Giraldo
- **Guitar:** Bruce Kagan
- **Guitar & Lap Steel:** Bruce Grossman
- **Vocals:** Rick Bray
- **Percussion:** Mike Dwyer
- **Everyone sings.**

We weren't a "greatest hits" Zappa band so much as a deep-cut dare. We did **"Cosmik Debris," "The Torture Never Stops," "Willie the Pimp," "My Guitar Wants to Kill Yo Mama," "Goblin Girl," "Son of Mr. Green Genes," "Trouble Every Day,"** and **"Dumb All Over."** We loved stitching things together too—**"Black Napkins" sliding into "Carolina Hard-Core Ecstasy,"** or "Camarillo Brillo" running straight into "Muffin Man." Ridiculous music, righteous music.

We did it for about **nine months**, and then it broke up—mutually. No big war, just the natural end of a strange, intense little run.

But it marked something important: a separation from the Tur't'lz without anyone saying it out loud.

Because by then, even though we were still writing and woodshedding new tunes, we weren't being serious about rehearsing anymore. Drugs had taken over. My friends had become fiends.

And I hit my limit.

I told the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz I was quitting music—both bands—and retiring in general. I told myself and other people that I was going to learn to cook vegetarian Indian food.

And I did.

That lasted about nine months.

The Joint Chiefs: I Came Back

Then I went to a party.

There were a lot of our friends and fans there—the whole ecosystem, the same faces that had stood in backyards and clubs and parking lots. And somewhere inside the house, in a bedroom, a band was playing.

The Joint Chiefs.

They sounded great. I recognized the drummer, **Andy Vandenbosch**, and we started talking. I told him about retirement—about being done, about quitting music, about the Indian food. I suggested maybe I could guest onstage for a song or two.

They invited me to their rehearsal spot—**their "barricade,"** named after their song and their space—and as soon as we started playing I knew the truth:

I wasn't retired.
I was just on pause.

I wanted to be in that band. I was back.

For the next year and a half I played great shows with the Joint Chiefs, including old haunts like **Mancini's**, where people were happy to have an ex–Pur'p'l Tur't'l bringing a crowd again—not because of nostalgia, but because the music was still alive.

Then in **1994**, **Dawn and I moved to Santa Cruz**, and I had to say goodbye—not just to the Joint Chiefs, but to the whole Valley universe of friends, bands, hangouts, and familiar rooms. After that, whenever I came back down to the Valley, it was **all reunions**—return trips, catch-up gigs, stories told in parking lots like no time had passed.

Santa Cruz became a new musical life. Different scene, different coastline, different set of characters—but the same hunger to play.

Eventually I joined a band called **The Hired Guns**, and in a way it felt like my two worlds were finally shaking hands.

It all came together for one of those nights that feels impossible even while you're living it: **my 30th birthday in Santa Cruz**, at the **Vets Hall**—a full-circle gig where **the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz played**, **The Hired Guns played**, **Edicius played**, and **B*A*R*F*** played too. One stage, multiple chapters of my life, all in the same room—like the universe throwing me a party and saying, *See? You didn't quit. You just kept changing forms.*

Chapter 17: Studio Days — Part II: Outtakes, Epics, and Improv (1990–1991)

If *Hatched* was our debut portrait, what came after were the sketches in the margins—raw, restless, sprawling. Once the neon-shelled cassettes were dubbed and sold, the Tascam reels kept spinning. So did our curiosity.

Between 1990 and ’91, Robbie Weaver’s first-class room became less “studio” and more **laboratory**.

Afterburners

Steve called these late-night runs our **afterburners**—the extra miles we squeezed out after the “album songs” were tracked. Fueled by cold coffee and stubbornness, we’d pile into Robbie’s space on weeknights and chase whatever spark showed up.

Sometimes it was Herman refusing to let a riff die. Sometimes Kenny walked in with a half-finished melody on a cassette. Sometimes I held a droning chord on keys until everyone else figured out where it wanted to go.

On the early runs, Todd kept the ship upright—quick hands, big ears. As the calendar rolled forward, Ron Russell began sitting in, bringing a heavier pocket and a calmer patience. Different drummers, same mission: stretch, listen, surprise each other.

Tape Tricks and Tangents

John showed us how to flip reels and ride varispeed. Suddenly Herman's solos coughed up hidden counter-melodies. We re-amped guitars in Robbie's tiled bathroom for natural slap, dragged a speaker into the laundry room for weird reflections, and abused a half-busted digital delay for ping-pong echoes.

If a take had a soul but limped, John would murmur, "Don't fix it—frame it."

Some nights we lived by the click; most nights we murdered it. The best takes breathed—tiny rushes around the downbeat, the kind of human wobble that makes a chorus lean forward.

Live-to-Two-Track Nights

Every few weeks we'd kill the safety net: no overdubs, stereo pair, red light on.

"Rolling (Ending)" earned its name that way—a groove that refused to stop, collapsing and rebuilding until it found a second wind. Earlier, "In-Between Nowhere" had taught us the value of leaving fingerprints on tape; these nights turned that lesson into doctrine.

We didn't know it then, but those boxes were a map we'd follow later—to **KXLU**, **Winston's OB**, **Mancini's**—proof that the studio and the stage were feeding each other.

Why It Mattered

None of these outtakes made us famous. They did something better.

They made us fearless.

The afterburner sessions taught us to trust the room, the tape, and each other—to chase a riff past embarrassment and into discovery. *Hatched* was the record. The afterburners were the fire that kept us warm when the phone didn't ring.

KXLU — Live In-Studio with Johnny V (12-20-90)

By late 1990, we'd played plenty of rooms where the "soundcheck" was basically someone yelling, "Is this on?" and the crowd reaction ranged from ecstatic to *please stop leaning on my car*. So when we got invited to do a live in-studio radio performance on **KXLU**, it felt like a different kind of milestone—less beer-soaked, more official, and somehow even more nerve-wracking.

The invite came through **Johnny V**, a friend and host connected through my Kinko's world—one of those Kinko's miracles where your day job quietly turns into a ladder. Johnny was the real deal: warm, supportive, and genuinely excited to have us on for **two full hours live** on the air.

Here's the twist: it wasn't like playing a club. It was like playing inside a maze.

KXLU had us set up in the studio in a way none of us were used to. We weren't all in one room facing each other like a band. We were spread out—different rooms, even hallways—so half the time you couldn't really see who was cueing what. You had to listen harder and trust that somewhere, behind a door, your bandmate was still in the same song.

And the other weird thing?

No crowd.

No cheers. No laughter. No "Wooo!" bouncing back at us. No faces telling you whether you're killing it or accidentally inventing a new genre called **Confidently Lost**.

At first, it felt like playing into a vacuum—just red lights, headphones, and that quiet radio-station intensity where you suddenly become aware of every breath you take. But once we got a few minutes in, it turned fun—unique, even surreal. We weren't feeding off an audience the way we usually did; we were feeding off each other, through walls, like a band performing telepathically.

And somehow… it worked.

Two hours on the air. A real broadcast. A real host. A real moment where the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz existed outside our usual ecosystem of flyers, house parties, and "trust us, this is happening."

Archive note: *Pur'p'l Tur't'lz — 12-20-90 — KXLU Live Radio Broadcast (Side A / Side B)*

Part IV — Legacy

Epilogue: Looking Back, Moving Forward

I started as the left-handed guitar player, then came a Yamaha with mini-keys and a brother who demanded two hands.

Years later, sitting beside his laptop while he digitized the tapes he'd insisted we make, I watched him do what he always did: turn a night into a memory you could hold.

Kenny's voice — chaos outside, care inside. He added the spice.

Ron's echo — "It's a long time ago, but it could have been a minute ago."

Herman's thread — the riff that refuses to quit until it becomes a song.

Bands end. The brotherhood doesn't. What lasts is the shell — the people who wear it, repair it, pass it on.

Coda: The Groove Endures

When the final lights dim and the last bass line fades, we raise our glasses — to Steve and Kenny — heads nodding in perfect 4/4.

Their groove endures because we keep playing, keep laughing, keep letting the night surprise us. The wheel keeps turning.

The shell holds.

Facebook Easter Egg — 2017

Back in 2017, Steve asked our Facebook family: "What should the name of the book be?" The comments turned into a comedy writers' room. Highlights:

- Turtle Chaps
- Coming Out of My Shell
- A Clockwork Tur't'l
- They Made It Up As They Went Along
- The Long and Binding Road
- Waiting for Uncle Stinky
- The Shells of Grateful Men
- Turtle Poop
- Headz and Turtle Tailz

And the eventual winner, suggested by Neil Liebert:

- **Hard To Handle**

That thread is the Hardshells in miniature — irreverent, loyal, endlessly creative.

Era Map (Steve's Frame)

- **Pre–Pur'p'l Tur't'lz (1982–mid '84)**
  Proto-bands, living-room jams, Haire Pharmerz, "mystery tapes."
- **Vol. 1 — Chris Baustert era (1983–1985)**
  "So-so band, best parties." Generators, parks, house shows; Hughes Jr. High (9-16-84); early clubs.

- **Vol. 2 — Todd Myers era (1986–1989)**
  "Hold on tight." Writing sprints, Country Club (Reseda) runs, Isla Vista, John Anson Ford Theatre.
- **Vol. 3 — Ron Russell era (1990–1993)**
  "Wow, we know what we're doing." Mancini's, Winston's OB residency, KXLU, Palomino swan songs.
- **Reunions & Coda (1994–2015)**
  1997 reunions, memorials, never-ending projects.

Anchor Timeline & Recordings (Highlights)

- **Pre-PT / Proto ('82–mid '84)**
  Living-room & garage jams; "mystery tapes"; Rhodes + Roland mono-synth era; Haire Pharmerz experiments; "Home" (Steve).
- **Vol. 1 — Chris ('83–'85)**
  9-16-84 Hughes Junior High; Shadow Ranch Park; Dennis Adkins generator era; SIR Studios (1-24-85, date contested); Chatsworth Park generator show; Ventura County Fairgrounds; La Cabaret Halloween '85; A&M Studios jingle session; Palomino 5-15-88 (rare early song rendition) later referenced.
- **Vol. 2 — Todd ('86–'89)**
  Country Club (Reseda) Labor Day fests; opening for Go Ahead; John Anson Ford Theatre 4-30-88; Isla Vista/People's Park; Trancas w/ Billy Preston; *Hatched* sessions; originals surge.

- **Vol. 3 — Ron (’90–’93)**
  Palomino c. ’90; Rehearsal 2-6-90; KXLU Live at the Head Shop; Winston’s OB residency (from 3-3-91); Mancini’s 3-16-91; Top of Topanga A-frame; Santa Cruz Vets Hall.
- **Reunions & Coda**
  1994–1997 reunion runs; “all seven Turtlz” tape; Steve memorial with Emmett Chapman.

Originals Index (Selected)
Two Magic Hands · Add a Little Spice to Life · Here We Are · P.C.H. (Please Come Home) · Little Time Left · Mystical Moon (lyrics: Vince Novo) · Freedom (Let the Children Live) · Passion, Greed, and Fear · Chance · Rolling (Ending) · Knights Dragon · Spot for Ya Baby · Nowhere to Turn · Get Up · You Know They Do · Home

Notable Covers (Recurring)
Grateful Dead core · Dylan · Talking Heads · Little Feat · “Feelin’ Alright” · assorted ’60s chestnuts

Pur’p’l Tur’t’lz Discography
(Last updated: December 2025)
Streaming archive (full Pur’p’l Tur’t’lz Archive): https://soundcloud.com/greg-brown-37/sets/purpl-turtlz-archive-a-k-a-the

1 · Official Studio Releases

1989 — *Hatched*

Tracked at Robbie Weaver Studios (Woodland Hills) on multitrack; engineered & mixed by John Cevatello.
Art: Racer (primary).
J-card typesetting & layout: Greg Brown.
Production: Greg Brown (litho coordination, J-card scoring, cassette mastering, printer/vendor approvals).
First run: 500 neon-airbrushed cassettes.

1991 — *Hatched* (John Cevatello Remix — Unreleased)

Polished mix circulated on high-bias Maxells among Hardshells.

2 · Legendary Bootlegs & Fan Tapes

- **1983 — "Hughes Hijack"** (abandoned campus; power outage mid-"Scarlet Begonias")
- **1984 — "First Club Nights"** (Halloween; debut of "Nowhere to Turn")
- **1986 — "Templin Sunrise"** (Camp Templin; Rabbit & the M&M's)
- **1987 — "Valley Freak-Truck '87"** (flatbed Mobile Jam Ventura → Zuma)
- **1988 — "Rubin Ghost Tape"** (Palomino)
- **1990 — "I'm a Man Sundays"** (Winston's OB)
- **1991 — "Live at the Head Shop"** (KXLU-FM)
- **1997 — "Shells at Sunset"** (Topanga reunion; double-drummer)

(Full MP3 sets live in the archive.)

3 · Mystery Tape Series

- **Vol. 1 — "Mystery '83"** (acoustic porch jams; Derek Povah on sax)
- **Vol. 2 — "Mystery '85"** (prob. July 4th; bottle-rocket ambience)
- **Vol. 3 — "Dan Briggs Sessions"** (late '82/early '83; early "Two Magic Hands," "Sea Dee")
-

4 · Radio & Broadcasts

- **1991 — KXLU Live at the Head Shop**
-

5 · Reunion & Side-Project Highlights

- **2004 — Santa Cruz Vet's Hall** (Bruce Kagan & Tony Giraldo fill-ins)
- **2012 — Valley Brew-Pub, Reseda** ("Mystical Moon Redux")

How to Contribute

Have a tape, DAT, MiniDisc, or phone memo we haven't digitized?
Email: turtlz.archive@gmail.com

Or drop a DM in the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Family Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/137835045410

"If you're not on somebody's mixtape by breakfast, did the gig even happen?" — Steve Bryant

About the Band Members

- **Steve "The Chronicler" Bryant** — Bass/voice, archivist, catalyst; "I'M PSYCHED!" as ignition switch.
- **Greg "Me" Brown** — Keys/voice, occasional guitar; documentarian with a stubborn left hand that finally learned a right.
- **Greg Herman** — Electric & 12-string guitar; fuzz poet and relentless riff-engine.
- **Kenny "The Fonz" Bellew** — Guitar/voice; charm, bite, and the "Spice."
- **Chris Baustert** — Drums (Version 1); Frankenstein kit, tribal thunder.
- **Todd Myers** — Drums (Version 2); fire and focus.
- **Ron Russell** — Drums (Version 3); college-honed heft and pocket.
- **Ethel Bryant** — Godmother of the shell; living-room patron saint.
- **Bruce Grossman (B*A*R*F*)** — Zappa-era friend; "They're fuck-ups, but they're my fuck-ups!"

Online Resources

Audio — The Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Archive
https://soundcloud.com/greg-brown-37/sets/purpl-turtlz-archive-a-k-a-the
Photos — Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Family (Facebook photos)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/137835045410/media/photos

Videos — *Too Hard to Handle* playlist
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdfla0zpEqdSHHMBT7AUvWx7QMoxAbE_K&si=IBt_c2utpwVD50g8
Book — Internet Archive edition
https://archive.org/details/too-hard-to-handle-purp-l-turt-lz-memoir-greg-brown
Merch — *Hatched* LP, mugs & more
https://direct.distrokid.com/gregbrown/

Index

A

- A&M Records (studio session; first major studio experience)
- Acid / LSD (use; bad trips; scene shift)
- Add a Little Spice to Life (origin; crowd “woo” section)
- Atlantic Records (contact attempt re: art)

B

- Blues for Allah (button art; influence)
- Bob Weir (bill shared; hanging after)
- Bootlegs / tapes (currency; trading culture; archival backbone)
- Branding / flyers / DIY promotion (copy shop; street posting)

C

- Calaveras County (trip; expectations vs reality; paranoia)
- Camp Templin (off-grid gig; edge of chaos)
- Chris Baustert (early kit; evolution)
- Club gigs (first “real rooms”; rules; expectation)
- Copy shops / print culture (tickets; calendars; flyers)

D

- Daniel Briggs (flatbed memory; early circle)
- Rick Rubin (Palomino sighting; card; Def American)
- Drugs (beer; weed; coke; meth; scene change; consequences)
- Def American (business card)

E

- Ethel Bryant (formal living room as jam HQ)
- Evan Marcus Rotman (witness voice; era framing)

F

- Fans (tribe vs audience; infrastructure)
- Fire on the Mountain (opening tune; big-room test)
- Forrest George (Topanga connection)

G

- Philip Garris (art story; copies)
- Franklin's Tower (early jams; long forms)
- Guitar Center (PA purchase)
- Gigs, off-grid (parks; campgrounds; claims; generators)

H

- Hatched (recording; cover production; release)
- Greg Herman (persona; riffs; housing; drive issues)

- Greg Brown (keys; Kinko's; archive driver)
- Kenny Bellew (songs; vibe; riffs; Pepperidge truck)
- Steve Bryant (tapes mission; energy; stage presence)
- Todd Myers (studio era; drive)
- Ron Russell (Ventura Theater era)

I

- Irvine (lot shows; scene expands)
- Improvisation (two-chord marathons; live DNA)
- In Living Color (Sunday ritual block)

J

- Jam sessions (living room; backyards; "therapy disguised as noise")
- Joe's Garage (garage-band archetype)

K

- Kinko's Copies (flyers; Palomino orbit; art reproduction)
- KXLU (live studio broadcast)
- Kai Krause (art referral)

L

- Larry Saltman (journals; "red line"; backstage control)
- Don Ray Phinney (paid rehearsals/recording; catalyst idea)

- “Lot shows” (Ventura; Irvine; parking-lot church; scene expansion)
- Living rooms (Ethel’s; off-limits becomes HQ)

M

- Merl Saunders (opening slot; generosity)
- Meth / hard-drug shift (late ’80s → early ’90s tone change)
- Topanga Canyon (house gigs; wild incidents)
- Ventura (theater; lot shows; home base)
- Married… with Children (Sunday ritual block)

N

- Naming (Pur’p’l / apostrophes / “flag” effect)
- Nowhere to Turn (early originals; set staples)

O

- Opening slots (big-room tests; discipline; soundcheck realities)
- Ocean Beach (Sunday house-band run)

P

- Palomino Club (gateway venue; orbit stories; losses; tests)
- Phil Ide (Templin account; scene texture)
- Reseda (Country Club; Valley core)

- San Fernando Valley (setting; culture; garages; strip malls)
- Picture Without Words (early original; timeline note)
- Promotion (flyers; lists; hotline; word-of-mouth grapevine)
- Grateful Dead (influence; tapers; side projects; culture)

R

- Radio (live broadcast; “no crowd” pressure test)
- Roger Dean (cover call; advice; worldview brief)

S

- Scarlet Begonias (club opener; early sets)
- Scene (community; safety; boundaries; drift over time)
- Sound systems / PA (professionalization; monitor drama; stakes)
- The Simpsons (Sunday ritual block)
- Mark Volman (copy shop encounter; backstage)
- Howard Kaylan (copy shop encounter; backstage)
- The Turtles (meeting; naming joke; missed sit-in)

T

- Tape machine / recording tech (Tascam; cassette archiving; the “tapes speak” ethic)

- Hansen Dam Recreation Area (free show; photos; “our own little Dead show”)
- Shoup Park (name origin)
- Tribe infrastructure (roadies; couches; flyer runs; security)

V

- Ventura Theater (residency; favorite room; growth)
- Isla Vista (alley gig; absurdity; hospitality)

W

- Winston's (Sunday residency; scene extension)
- Wolf & Rissmiller's Country Club (Go Ahead bill; monitor crisis; shock story)

Credits

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In the San Fernando Valley's '80s underground,
a misspelled band name became a flag:

Pur'p'l Tur't'lz.

From living-room chaos to Palomino nights,
Dead-show parking-lot gigs, and a *tribe of fans called*
the Hardshells, this is an inside story
of music, mayhem, brotherhood—
and the fragile magic of a scene that
burned bright and didn't last long enough.

"A memoir, a time capsule,
and an archive you can hear."

Greg Brown is a musician, producer, and educator based in Santa Cruz, California. He p played *keyboards in Pur'p'l Tur'tlz* and curated the band's *living archive of recordings, flyers, and artifacts.*

Listen to the Pur'pl Turtlz Archive

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